



OUT OF HARMONY

*A Chronicle Of The October 21, 1996
Harmony Grove Fire That Rampaged
Through Southeast Carlsbad,
Destroying 54 Homes*

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One of the initial photographers on the La Costa fire scene, North County Times photographer Hayne Palmour photographed Carlsbad Fire Engineer Jack Crabtree, one of the first firefighters in the area, as he worked feverishly to save a house on Esfera Street.

Jack Crabtree ...

"I breathed in the heavy winds and ate smoke pretty good."

Jack Crabtree was part of an off-duty contingent that also included Rick Fisher and Allen Vas. Earlier in the day, Crabtree and Fisher had seen the fire in Harmony Grove, called and reported in, while Vas had stopped by to pick up some of his belongings.

Quickly dispatched in the department's new brush engine to La Costa Avenue and Rancho Santa Fe Road, the trio performed reconnaissance and related duties in that area, until, in Crabtree's words, "we saw fire coming through like crazy. We headed down Rancho Santa Fe. It was like driving through a snowstorm. We made a right on Cadencia and another right on Esfera. Driving to the end of the block, we saw homes burning beyond salvage on Bajo Court, made a U-turn and started saving the homes we knew we could save on the north side of Esfera. The ones across the street were already goners."

The heat was beyond belief, recalled Crabtree. "I took a supply line to the hydrant in front of a fully involved house. I breathed in the heavy winds and ate smoke pretty good. Other firefighters joined us. We were there four hours. We saved all the homes on the north side of Esfera."

Hayne Palmour ...

"Embers swirled across the hood of my car like snowflakes. Everything glowed red."

North County Times photographer Hayne Palmour's long day's journey into night began in Tustin, where he shot photos of the fire attacking that locale. Heading south through San Clemente about 4:00 pm, he saw a huge column of smoke, which he surmised was local. Racing back to the office, he patched together bits of sketchy information, sped out to Palomar Airport and hitched a ride on a tiny helicopter, taking aerial photos of the blaze in Harmony Grove while being buffeted by 70 mile-per-hour winds.

Back on the ground and realizing the fire might hit La Costa, he communicated with his city editor, who told him to track it down. As soon as Palmour hit traffic-clogged Alga Road, he knew the event was serious.

"I saw fire coming fast across the hill as people on the sidewalks watched in awe. I arrived at Rancho Santa Fe Road minutes after the wall of flame had gone through. Embers swirled across the hood of my car like snowflakes. Everything glowed red. The sound of the roaring fire was deafening. The smoke was incredible."

After taking photos of the engulfed homes on the back side of the fire on Bajo Court, Palmour darted to the other side, where he was greeted by intense heat and bright yellow flames.

"It was hard to breathe. I'd run through the embers and find shelter. I'd take photos and run back through the embers again."

After taking several amazing shots of fire and firefighters, Palmour slogged through a second traffic jam on Alga, went home to catch a few hours of sleep, and returned to the scene, exhausted, at daybreak on Tuesday. By this time, he was joined by hoards of media personnel, both local and national, print and television.

"I watched residents desolately park their car stuffed full of belongings at the curb. They'd walk down the pavement of their driveway — which now led to nothing. Some cried. Some shrugged in utter disbelief. Some were angry. A few were philosophical.

"I saw firefighters from around California who'd spent 12 hours traveling to get here now log the first of 12 more hours mopping up. I saw residents bring food and words of gratitude to firefighters sleeping in Stagecoach Park. I saw high school kids spontaneously create and carry a big 'Thank You' sign to the people who'd helped save their homes."

Hayne Palmour's array of heart-wrenching photos illuminating the pages of his paper in the days to follow told the awesome, awful story of the Harmony Grove fire. Readers moved by his work would agree with this courageous photographer's succinct summary of the event: "It was quite a night."

CARLSBAD CITY COUNCIL RECOLLECTIONS



**Mayor Claude A.
"Bud" Lewis**

Although the fire itself was a disaster, many things connected with it impressed me. I was surprised at how effective and efficient the Emergency Operating Center was, in such a very short time. I was pleased with the wonderful efforts of the Red Cross people. I was happy to see the Council members right there on the spot; we passed an emergency declaration in the middle of the night.

I was amazed to see Governor Pete Wilson get there so fast; we toured the burned-out area with him the very next morning. It was rewarding to get his commitment to help, which opened the door for federal assistance as well.

Of everything I witnessed, I was most impressed with the amount of aid that came in from around the State. Carlsbad firefighters and staff are excellent, but until you see the deployment of Statewide resources in action, it's hard to believe.

When I observed those exhausted guys and gals the next morning, I realized we couldn't have handled the fire ourselves. And I learned that if we all work collectively together, we really can accomplish anything.



**Mayor Pro Tem
Ramona Finnila**

Council member Nygaard and I were in San Diego at a Port District function. As we walked through the staging area of the event, we saw television coverage on a monitor and heard the word "Carlsbad." We froze in disbelief.

We headed back to Carlsbad immediately, exiting I-5 at La Costa Avenue trying to get to the Safety Center. Traffic along El Camino Real was stopped. Everyone was looking east toward the blaze. Eventually we made it to the Safety Center and saw the Emergency Operating Center was already in operation.



**Council Member
Matt Hall**

I was watching Monday Night Football at a friend's house when a report showing the fire hitting Carlsbad interrupted the beginning of the game. I immediately went to the EOC, arriving about 6:30. I was impressed with the efficiency of the response. Early on, when he discovered that water pressure in the fire area was dangerously low, Water District Manager Bob Greaney immediately turned on his laptop computer, dialed up the appropriate site and brought the pressure up, like magic.

I knew many people who lived in the fire area, including the families of kids I'd coached in soccer. I was very concerned, so the Mayor and I drove around, skirting the fire, to check on the emergency shelters. The smoke ... the heat ... the sparks ... the flames ... the traffic ... the people ... the chaos: the scene was totally unbelievable. That's one night I won't forget.



**Council Member
Ann Kulchin**

My husband and I had replaced our shake roof just five months before the fire. Thankfully, the blaze did not reach our immediate street.

However, I will never feel the same about a Santa Ana again. I used to welcome it as a nice warm wind. Now, it scares the hell out of me.



**Council Member
Julianne Nygaard**

I was in awe of how quickly the City staff came together and mobilized to handle the emergency. The disaster preparedness exercises really worked, and so did our employees. Everything was managed efficiently, down to the last details. Food appeared in a timely manner to feed the workers. It was great seeing how well our City functioned under pressure.

All in all, that Monday evening in October was a frightening night; something I'll remember my whole life. Late in the evening, we walked out of the Safety Center and looked east toward the hills. I could tell when a house would go because the flame would change color and a bright plume would suddenly appear. That's when I would know that the entire history of someone's life was literally going up in smoke.

Acknowledgements

This Chronicle was compiled based on information from a variety of print and television media reports; specifically, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, *North County Times* and *Sun* newspapers as well as KGTV, KNSD, KFMB and KUSI television stations. Appreciation goes also to the many Carlsbad employees, staff from an array of firefighting agencies, personnel from involved organizations and citizens who contributed their time, opinions, photos and reminiscences to this report.

A Note About Accuracy

Due to the fast-moving nature of the fire, the majority of Carlsbad Fire Department, other City and multijurisdictional staff time was devoted to managing the emergency. For that reason, some details reported were sketchy and incomplete. Other particulars were recounted in interviews conducted months after the fire and so were subject to individual memory. In a few cases, minor discrepancies of “who did what when” surfaced. In the fire-induced darkness and chaos, it was easy to lose precise track of time. Some events occurred simultaneously, adding to the confusion.

Every attempt has been made to assure the accuracy of the timetable and narrative of events. It being impossible to document the complete effect on each individual structure and citizen, key events have been selected to indicate the movement of the fire, progression of responses to the emergency, impact on a variety of people and full force of the calamity.

BACK COVER

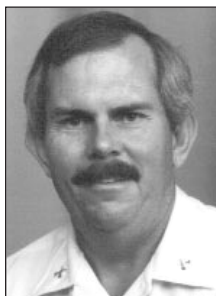
Back To Harmony

This photo of residents and firefighters involved in the October 21, 1996 Harmony Grove fire was taken near the intersection of Cadencia and Esfera Streets in the heart of the fire-impacted La Costa area at 5:06 pm on October 21, 1997, precisely one year after the fire blazed into the neighborhood. Pictured here are (left to right) Tom Christ, Paramedic/Firefighter Robert Morris, Captain Steven Ruggles, Sue Darnell, Engineer Peter McKenzie and Pat Luedke. The photo was taken by photographer Tom Henderson, who himself lost his home in the conflagration.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**Michael E. Smith,
Carlsbad Fire Department
Division Chief**

This publication provides all the basic information normally associated with after-action reports, such as facts and figures, lessons learned and remedies to be applied. However, it also presents a chronicle of the fire in a format that attempts to capture the full impact of the event through the observations, opinions, experiences and emotions of the citizens and those who came to their aid.

The Incident

The Harmony Grove Fire of October 21, 1996 was the most serious emergency event in Carlsbad's history. At 5:06 pm, slightly over three hours after the fire began in the unincorporated community of Harmony Grove, shifting winds drove the fire across the southeastern boundary of the City, and into residential neighborhoods of La Costa.

By midnight, the winds subsided and the fire began to die out, leaving \$11.8 million in private loss in the form of 54 Carlsbad homes destroyed and dozens of others damaged. Fortunately, no fatalities occurred in Carlsbad; however, four firefighters and two residents were injured. Sadly, earlier that afternoon, David Hammond, a Harmony Grove resident, was severely burned as he attempted to evacuate his home. Mr. Hammond would later succumb to those injuries.

Response

During the early hours of the fire, Carlsbad stripped its resources to a minimum, dispatching unit after unit to the Harmony Grove area. Although the fire was advancing on a bearing that would skirt the city, the strategy was to try at all costs to control it early before it could approach the city or reach developed areas in the northeast city limits of Encinitas. When the fire unexpectedly changed direction and began to burn west into Carlsbad, what remained of the City's forces were dispatched to the La Costa neighborhoods, along with the last of the remaining fire mutual aid units in the county.

In addition to the deployment of fire, police and public works personnel to the fire scene, 55 City employees responded to the Emergency Operating Center (EOC) and key offices in accordance with the City Emergency Plan. Within one hour of the fire's assault on the city, the EOC was operational and communication with field command was established. At 6:25 pm, in accordance with the City Emergency Plan, the City Manager proclaimed the existence of a state of emergency in the City of Carlsbad. The County of San Diego likewise proclaimed an emergency, followed the next day by the Governor, who in turn urged the President to declare the county a disaster area. On October 23, 1996, President Clinton declared the existence of a state of emergency in the county.

The fire was contained by 6:00 pm on October 23, and fully controlled 24 hours later. Over 700 firefighters from state and federal agencies responded to Carlsbad's call for assistance. Many traveled several hundred miles and therefore did not arrive until well after the fire had been contained.

Immediately following the incident, and for months thereafter, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES), Red Cross, Salvation Army and other private organizations worked with victims to help them meet their care and shelter needs. City building, planning and engineering departments enacted emergency policies to facilitate the rebuilding process. Within 18 months of the fire, rebuilding permits had been issued for all but two of the homes lost.

Service Costs

The combined service expenses incurred by the communities of Carlsbad, Harmony Grove, San Marcos and Encinitas approached one million dollars. Carlsbad's losses exceeded \$500,000, approximately \$300,000 of which would ultimately be recovered through reimbursement by FEMA and OES.

Over half the City's response costs were related to stabilization of the hillsides burned over by the fire. It was feared that heavy rains predicted within days after the fire would wash the loose soil

from the denuded hillsides and steep canyon walls and carry it downstream, subjecting facilities and valuable habitat to flood damage and/or heavy sedimentation. During the weeks following the fire, City engineering staff employed Department of Corrections personnel and other conservation services to create sediment control check dams and desiltation basins that successfully controlled runoff over the entire fire area.

Significant Issues

The firefighting effort was impeded by a number of conditions and situations, most of which are common to the wildfire siege that recurs annually throughout Southern California.

CONDITIONS

1. Dry east winds of moderate to high velocity.
2. Low humidity and high temperature.
3. Overtaxed firefighting resources due to simultaneous incidents throughout the region.
4. Combustible roofs.

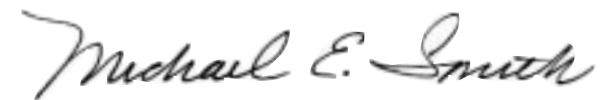
SITUATIONS

1. Restricted traffic flow during evacuation due to road repairs.
2. Sudden evacuation order to citizens.
3. Communication restricted due to inadequate radio system.
4. Onlookers impeding fire operations.

Improvements

Since the fire, the City has upgraded its roofing ordinance to exclude the use of wood as a roof covering, and has been a key participant in the development and implementation of a new countywide radio system that should eliminate the communication difficulties experienced during the incident. As of this writing, the City is also evaluating telephone communication systems that will permit direct contact with large numbers of residents simultaneously during emergencies.

It must be noted that in the aftermath of this incident, as with any serious emergency, some citizens will voice displeasure with the manner in which it was handled and the assistance they received. While no amount of planning can prepare the citizens or their governing bodies to deal efficiently with every contingency, it is the position of the City of Carlsbad that despite the shortcomings and difficulties listed above, the emergency response effort by the City, the County of San Diego, the State of California and the U.S. Government was reasonable, and appropriate.



Michael E. Smith,
Carlsbad Fire Department Division Chief

SANTA ANAS SET THE STAGE

A dry wind and dry terrain are a wildfire's best friends.

Linked often in literature and legend with bizarre behavior, the Santa Ana is erratic, unpredictable, eccentric; a dry, hot, gusty wind that blows from the north and northeast, sucking moisture out of chaparral. Once a spark ignites the first dry blade of grass, strong Santa Anas can quickly fan a small wildfire into storm-like proportions, shifting the conflagration's direction of attack in ways impossible to predict.

Fires used to be a part of the natural ecology, but now that they are not allowed to occur naturally in the brush, dry fuel accumulates in what is indigenously a dry area such as Harmony Grove, and indeed, all of Southern California.

Urbanization has put fires — and the people they impact — at the mercy of Santa Anas. A century ago, several small fires would burn during the summer, consuming older brush and leaving newer, moister vegetation untouched. Now, the fire season has moved to fall, the season when Santa Anas reign. Instead of beginning "naturally," these fires typically arise by arson or accident, and though they occur less frequently, they are much bigger, burning larger areas of old, dried brush.

NO ADVANCE WARNING

"It's just another day in Paradise."

—ROD STEWART

Mostly sunny and pleasant" was the early forecast for San Diego County on Monday, October 21, 1996. The National Weather Service predicted that North County residents could expect highs in the mid-70s, lows in the mid-50s, and an average humidity of 60 percent. Although gusty winds were kicking up in nearby mountains and deserts, refreshing breezes near the coast promised to add that pleasant autumnal ambience that always reminds San Diegans how lucky they are to live in their Southern California paradise.

It would be a perfect evening to cheer on the San Diego Chargers as they faced the Oakland Raiders at Jack Murphy Stadium, thought Carlsbad residents John and Melissa Burlison, who left their Esfera Street home to attend the game. Their Cadencia Street neighbor, Pat Luedke, was planning on enjoying the football game with his wife and son from the cozy confines of a local sports pizza restaurant.

Back east, languorous summers swirl slowly into crisp falls, heralded by October's turning of the leaves. Orange and red are the colors of autumn. At its peak, the scene is achingly beautiful and hard to forget.

The seasons changed swiftly and unforgettably on October 21 in Carlsbad, California. Orange and red were the colors of the day, but instead of illuminating peaceful, tree-lined streets on a fine Wisconsin morning, they lit up the California sky all afternoon and long into the night, devouring bone-dry brush, trees and homes; consuming millions of dollars worth of property; exhausting human endurance and local resources; and changing lives, with a vengeance, but also ultimately amid a spirit of unity, forever.

**MONDAY AFTERNOON,
OCTOBER 21, 1996:
DUE TO ARSON
OR ACCIDENT,
THE WORST FIRE
IN NORTH
SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S
KNOWN HISTORY
IS ABOUT TO BEGIN***

9:00 AM The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) transmits a "Red Flag Warning" to the Carlsbad Fire Department and other area agencies, indicating extreme weather conditions conducive to the incidence and spread of potential local wildfires.

**Times and occurrences included in this timetable were taken from Carlsbad fire and police logs, City staff and multijurisdictional agency reports, media accounts and interviews with involved personnel.*

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES

*"As of 1615 Hrs, total area burned estimated at 1000 Acres ...
This is a fast moving fire which we will be monitoring.
These fires normally start to 'lay down' around 5:00 pm
but with the Santa Ana winds, anything is possible."*

—DANIEL J. EBERLE, DIRECTOR,
SAN DIEGO COUNTY OFFICER OF DISASTER PREPAREDNESS,
STATUS REPORT, OCTOBER 21, 1996

On the morning of Monday, October 21, 1996, residents of the upscale La Costa area located in the southeast quadrant of the city of Carlsbad were leaving their homes for work, school and other daily activities. A scant 12 hours later, many of those residents would be forced to evacuate or unable to return to their cherished homes.

By the morning of Tuesday, October 22, families who had lived in dozens of those homes would be picking through burned-out rubble, salvaging a piece of crockery here, part of a stuffed animal there; gazing aghast at what used to be their entryway, living room, kitchen and bedrooms. All that remained of one house was the address on a tile signpost and memories of what once dwelt inside.

Within a few dreadful hours, Carlsbad experienced the most overwhelming natural calamity in its history; indeed, the erratic wildfire was one of the worst to impact San Diego County as far back as records show. Beginning shortly before 2:00 pm from an undetermined but suspicious cause in an unincorporated area of North San Diego County known as Harmony Grove, the fire quickly engulfed portions of Elfin Forest, threatening Escondido and Encinitas, savagely tearing into Carlsbad and

rampaging as well into San Marcos.

One fire-related fatality occurred. An Elfin Forest man evacuating by car hit a fire hydrant, stalled out, abandoned his vehicle, tried to escape the flames on foot, and was overrun by fire, suffering burns that 22 days later took his life. Ironically, his home sustained damage only to the garage and landscaping.

In Carlsbad, the fire destroyed over 1,900 acres of watershed and 54 homes totaling approximately \$12 million in assessed value, incurring hard costs related to emergency response, recovery activities and lost assets approaching \$600,000. Personal losses, in terms of tangibles such as money, as well as emotional trauma and other intangibles, were beyond calculation.

Carlsbad firefighters were quickly recalled to their posts even before the wind shifted and the fire changed direction, invading Carlsbad a little after 5:00 pm. As 911 lines lit up unceasingly, all fire and police personnel were mobilized, the City's Emergency Operations Center was opened, a State of Emergency was declared, and staff from far-flung departments came together to take immediate action according to a predetermined emergency plan.

In addition to city personnel, county and state mutual aid systems provided over 50 fire engines, 200 firefighters and 70 police officers at the peak of fire activity, with a total of 137 engines and over 700 firefighters ultimately contributing to the effort. Due to fires raging in counties north of Carlsbad, some of the requested aid did not arrive.

Damage assessment and recovery efforts began long before the last embers were extinguished. Most of those involved in the multi-agency, county-wide effort agreed that although the fire was truly devastating, the loss of property and life could have been far greater.

During the fire, individuals and organizations spontaneously brought food to firefighters and police officers. In the aftermath, outpourings of help and support from sources small and large, often presented in anonymity, spread as fast as the previous night's flames.

The Carlsbad firestorm emanated from Harmony Grove. This is the story of that fire, and of how the city and its citizens pulled together to return to harmony once again.

BY WIND POSSESSED

"There was a desert wind blowing that night. It was one of those hot dry Santa Anas that come down through the mountain passes and curl and make your nerves jump and your skin itch. On nights like that every booze party ends in a fight.

*Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife
and study their husband's neck. Anything can happen.
You can even get a full glass of beer at a cocktail lounge."*

—RAYMOND CHANDLER

A few minutes before 2:00 pm on Monday, October 21, 1996, the initial call of a brush fire at Harmony Grove Road between Questhaven Road and Wilgen Drive was received at the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Department and shared with the Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove Volunteer Fire Department and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF). CDF (which covers the unincorporated brush areas of San Diego County) immediately dispatched its standard strike team consisting of five engines, two air tankers, one helicopter, one bulldozer and two 15-person fire crews.

Within nine minutes, Elfin Forest Chief Frank Twohy was first at the scene, at 9237 Harmony Grove Road. He and his assistant opened their vehicles and set up a command post. As Rancho Santa Fe Deputy Fire Chief Dallas Neville pulled up shortly thereafter, he watched the first tanker drop its load of pink retardant into the isolated area through the canopy of trees. Unfortunately, much of it landed on Twohy's maps and radios, rendering them useless.

CDF Battalion Chief Charles Maner, who would eventually serve as Unified Incident Commander, received the call while awaiting his TB test at an Escondido hospital. Telling the nurse, "Stick me quick and let me go!" Maner quickly reconnoitered with his colleagues in Harmony Grove and began plotting a course of action.

Although the Carlsbad Fire Department had deployed resources to a fire in Encinitas and therefore did not dispatch resources to Harmony Grove until later in the afternoon, Division Chief Brian Watson was returning to Carlsbad from Encinitas when he heard about the Harmony Grove fire and decided to investigate. Communicating by radio, Maner told Watson they were shorthanded and asked him to report to the Harmony Grove command post. Watson became a structure group supervisor and worked at the site until after 8:00 pm that evening, after which he returned to Carlsbad and became, along with Sonny Hilliard, Carlsbad representative to the Unified Incident Command.

1:52 PM The Rancho Santa Fe Fire Department receives a call from a citizen spotting a fire near 9237 Harmony Grove Road, between Questhaven Road and Wilgen Drive. The call is shared with the San Diego headquarters of CDF, which has jurisdiction in the brush areas of this unincorporated portion of the county.

1:55 PM CDF dispatches a standard attack team to the scene of the reported fire.

2:01 PM The first units on the scene report a fast-moving vegetation fire and request additional assistance immediately.

2:03 PM Local fire agencies respond to the fire, over the next three hours steadily dispatching engines, firefighters and overhead staff to assist CDF and the mutual aid units in the Harmony Grove area.

3:53 PM The Carlsbad Fire Department receives a request for one engine to participate in a strike team unit, and dispatches a brush engine to Harmony Grove.

A BRUSH WITH DISASTER ... AND A LITTLE BIT OF LUCK

As longtime residents of Elfin Forest familiar with the vagaries of wildfires, Tom and Karen Henderson had carefully cleared the brush in a huge circular area hundreds of feet from their Fortuna del Norte custom home, which had a non-combustible fiberglass shingle roof. In a way, the precautions worked, although not as the Hendersons had foreseen.

Tom Henderson explained, "When we returned to the neighborhood on Tuesday morning, we saw a huge doughnut: the fire had burned right up to the clearing and the house was gone (we'd been told it was one of the first to burn and had practically vaporized), but the huge circle surrounding our home remained unscathed."

Later, Henderson learned that some residents in this very rural neighborhood managed to grab the key Ps as they rushed out: papers, photos, and of course people and pets. Seeing a wall of flame, one husband tossed the dogs in the car and drove out as his wife followed on her horse.

Neither of the Hendersons had been able to get home from work in time to save their belongings, although when he learned of the fire shortly after 2:00 pm, Tom made a resourceful effort.

"I drove my car as far as the [now closed] San Marcos landfill on Questhaven, but the roadblocks were up and manned by police officers who allowed no entry. I paid my five dollars to enter the landfill; I figured if I could drive to the far corner of the dump, I'd be less than half a mile from my house and I could skirt the cops and sneak in on foot. I parked my car and started off down the hill. Then I realized it was too late. Although I could barely see through the smoke, I knew the fire had gone past my house and that whatever happened had already happened. I knew our cats and dogs would either be alive or dead and there was nothing I could do about it." (The dogs did live; the cats, sadly, did not.)

Tom concluded, "In retrospect, I made the right decision. The one person who died from the fire was a neighbor of ours. He stayed too long. He died trying to save his property. It wasn't worth it."

As their house literally went up in smoke, Tom said they lost almost everything ... but not quite.

"Monday night is laundromat night for me. Before I headed out to my photography studio in Sorrento Valley that morning, I tossed the dirty laundry in my car. Thanks to my laundry schedule, we weren't left totally out in the cold, forced to fend for ourselves with only the clothes on our backs. We had a week's worth of dirty clothes on our backs!"

And Then The Winds Kicked In

Noting that about 75 firefighters initially responded to the call, CDF Fire Prevention Specialist and Information Officer Roxanne Provaznik remembered that the day had begun with light winds, which then became calm. “It turned out to be the calm before the storm,” she recalled.

The wind, which had been breezing along at 10-15 mph, “picked up with a vengeance, and almost before we knew it, all hell broke loose,” Provaznik recounted. Amid very low (10-20 percent and decreasing) humidity, the wind-driven fire raged across 50 acres as CDF began to call in additional strike teams from around the county and across the state. The swirling winds hampered operations of air tankers and helicopters, and smoke grew thick.

Information coming into the centralized CDF command post was sketchy, as all available firefighters were occupied in fighting the fire. Communicating with personnel in the field, Provaznik queried, “How many homes have we lost?” The reply was harried and breathless: “We haven’t had time to count. A bunch!”

As the winds continued to pick up, firefighters tried desperately to establish an anchor point — a safe location from which to attack the fire and protect structures — but each time, according to Provaznik, they found the fire had arrived before them.

At one point, Maner said, they were considering setting a backfire on Rancho Santa Fe Road from Questhaven south to prevent the fire from crossing the road. Hundreds of foolish people recklessly gawking at the blaze from the brush forced the plan to be abandoned.

Turmoil Reflected On TV

Local afternoon television programming was interrupted, sporadically at first, and with an eerie tranquility that belied the pandemonium to follow as day turned into hellish night. Early reports mentioned a fire burning in the brush but not threatening homes. Lyrical street names — Elfin Forest Glen, Dovehollow, Harmony Grove, Questhaven — formed an illusory backdrop for the stark reality of approaching flames.

The TV scenario changed abruptly, with later afternoon broadcasts focusing solely on the fast-moving fire, depicting the battle in the air and on the land. The reporting became as all-consuming as the blaze, with vivid aerials of swirling winds, billowing smoke and flaming structures. The media became the message, as apprehension and even fear were reflected, throughout the afternoon and far into the night, in the voices and body language of reporters.

Cameras on the ground captured emotional vignettes of residents hastily evacuating homes; tossing pets into cars, leading horses down urban roads and hurrying them into vans. The members of one news crew dropped their equipment and raced to help a woman rescue her multitude of cats. Volunteers from the San Diego Humane Society Animal Rescue Team arrived to evacuate nine horses and three dogs from the fire zone.

By now, the fire was morphing from a wildland fire, consuming mostly vegetation, to an urban environment in which structures and buildings helped fuel the blaze. Wood shake shingle roofs and consumable perimeter landscaping such as oil-rich eucalyptus trees became instant blowtorches in Harmony Grove/Elfin Forest, as they later would become in Carlsbad, Encinitas and San Marcos.

Members of a CDF strike team were working to protect the Questhaven Retreat south of San Marcos when flames raging from the canyon surrounded them, forcing the firefighters to dive under their engine to find

4:00 PM San Marcos opens the first of its three shelters, at San Marcos High School.

4:15 PM Observing that the fire “is moving pretty quick,” San Diego County’s Office of Disaster Preparedness assesses the total acres burned at 1,000. An agency status report states that the Red Cross is establishing temporary Elfin Forest evacuation points, and the Humane Society’s Animal Rescue Reserve is on its way to take care of livestock.

4:22 PM Upon request, the Carlsbad Fire Department dispatches two additional brush engines to Harmony Grove.

4:30 PM Carlsbad Fire Chief Dennis Van Der Maaten initiates a callback of all Carlsbad personnel to handle the growing emergency in Harmony Grove and to help prevent the fire from reaching Carlsbad.

4:32 PM Battalion Chief Sonny Hilliard is appointed Carlsbad’s Agency Representative to

EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OF RESOURCES ... **MUTUAL AID AND UNIFIED INCIDENT COMMAND**

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes and fires do not recognize man-made boundaries or stop at city limits. Fortunately, jurisdictional responses cross these boundaries as well. During the October 1996 blaze, resources were activated in the traditional ascending order: local, operational area, region and state.

The longstanding California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) was established to ensure coordination by all emergency response agencies in multijurisdictional events through the Incident Command Systems and Mutual Aid System. During the first hours of the fire, the Carlsbad Fire Department worked in conjunction with CDF and cities of San Marcos and Encinitas to formulate a Unified Incident Command to handle the complex situation.

When the call first went out to help Harmony Grove, nearby fire departments joined in assisting to fight the fire. Engines from two Carlsbad fire stations would eventually go to Harmony Grove. Before and after them, many other resources flowed into the area.

Since the Harmony Grove fire began in the State Responsibility Area (SRA) of Valley Center, it fell under the purview of CDF; specifically under Battalion Chief Charles Maner, who shared responsibility for the Fallbrook and Valley Center battalions.

Early on, CDF was linked with the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Department as well as the Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove Volunteers. Eventually, the command post was moved to Stagecoach Park and the Unified Incident Command management team was comprised of agency representatives from all five fire-impacted jurisdictions: Carlsbad, San Marcos and Encinitas as well as CDF and Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove.

Under Incident Commander Maner, Carlsbad representatives Brian Watson and Sonny Hilliard participated in decision-making throughout the event. "Especially from a standpoint of using resources to their best advantage, without duplicating efforts or leaving areas isolated from attention, Unified Command works exceedingly well," concluded Brian Watson.

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF UNIFIED INCIDENT COMMAND

The Laguna fire of 1970, which burned 180,000 acres from Mt. Laguna down to the suburbs of El Cajon, illuminated the need for a coordinated effort. According to fire officials who participated in that event, units passed each other on the roadways and resources were scattered hither and yon, impeding an efficient response and thwarting efforts to handle the fire.

Agency officials learned their lesson well, establishing an Incident Command system called FireScope, which became a national standard in fire management. Over the past decades, police agencies and local government followed suit and the concept proved to be an effective way to generate an efficient framework of cooperation.

In 1996, as a result of meetings and other ongoing interactions, staff from various area agencies already knew and respected each other, making cooperation and coordination on the fire line a smooth operation. In fact, the Unified Incident Command, with its central representation, shared information and partnering for a common goal, offers a paradigm of how individuals, companies, governments and countries can work together in efficient harmony.

oxygen. Lkening the fire's sound to a jet engine, firefighter Rich Bastien remembered watching the blaze sweep over him, then returning to the vehicle and speeding off down a narrow dirt road while flames wrapped around the engine. He told a reporter, "It was probably one of the most significant times of my life."

Activities were focused totally on structure protection, with even the brush engines being deployed to help save homes, as opposed to trying to stop or control the fire. Dead radio areas and jammed frequencies hampered communications. Personnel sent out to determine the status of the fire ended up getting involved in fighting it instead as it attacked homes, recounted CDF's Maner, who after 25 years in his field recognized the immensity of the problem.

"Early on, I knew we wouldn't be able to stop this fire. Once it hit the bluff above Harmony Grove and started running and the wind surfaced, we knew we couldn't stop it. The only question was which direction would it take."

Too Close For Comfort

While carting carloads of valuables from his home, one resident said the fire was so close to him, "If you've got some frankfurters, you could put them on a stick and cook them."

Firefighters themselves were not immune to the worries facing civilian homeowners. Volunteer Elfin Forest firefighter Nona Barker, who was with one of the first fire crews on the Harmony Grove scene, had to take a hurried break to get her 11-year-old son out of their Elfin Forest home.

Earlier that day, fires in Orange and Los Angeles counties had called upon local and regional firefighters for assistance. In the Lemon Heights area near Tustin, more than 150 firefighters battled a furious blaze while families scrambled from their homes and residents still in business suits were seen on rooftops with garden hoses. Wildfires would burn, too, in the Otay Mountain area near the Mexican border and on Rincon Indian Reservation, further diluting regional resources.

During the height of the fire, Encinitas Fire Chief Don Heiser forged through smoky roads in search of the hottest hot spots, but more than once, when he tried to pin down radio dispatchers for a timeframe on the arrival of reinforcements, he was told, "We're stretched to the limit. You're on your own." Two days later, some of the firefighters who had not slept since the fire's outbreak would be driving along the same roads, putting out hot spots, commiserating with residents who had lost their homes and even offering to help clean up sooty yards.

The Carlsbad Response

Carlsbad Fire Chief Dennis Van Der Maaten kept Carlsbad City Manager Ray Patchett apprised of the Harmony Grove situation throughout the early afternoon. At that point, the path of the fire did not appear to threaten Carlsbad.

Returning from a small brush fire in Encinitas, Carlsbad Fire Captain Joe Harden had noticed smoke in Harmony Grove. A 20-year veteran, he, too, had no idea of the magnitude of the emergency that would be facing his community in just a few hours.

A little after 1:30 pm, Carlsbad Battalion Chief Sonny Hilliard also spotted a column of smoke east of the city. Over the next few hours, radio traffic and a dramatic increase in the size of the header indicated that a major fire was developing.

the newly formed, CDF-led Unified Incident Command management team. He is dispatched to the Harmony Grove command post at Questhaven and Harmony Grove Roads. The main command post will follow the fire and be established in the community center building at Carlsbad's Stagecoach Park.

4:50 PM Hilliard reports he is unable to reach the command post due to fire blocking the road.

4:51 PM Fire is reported in Elfin Forest at Questhaven and Atterbury Roads.

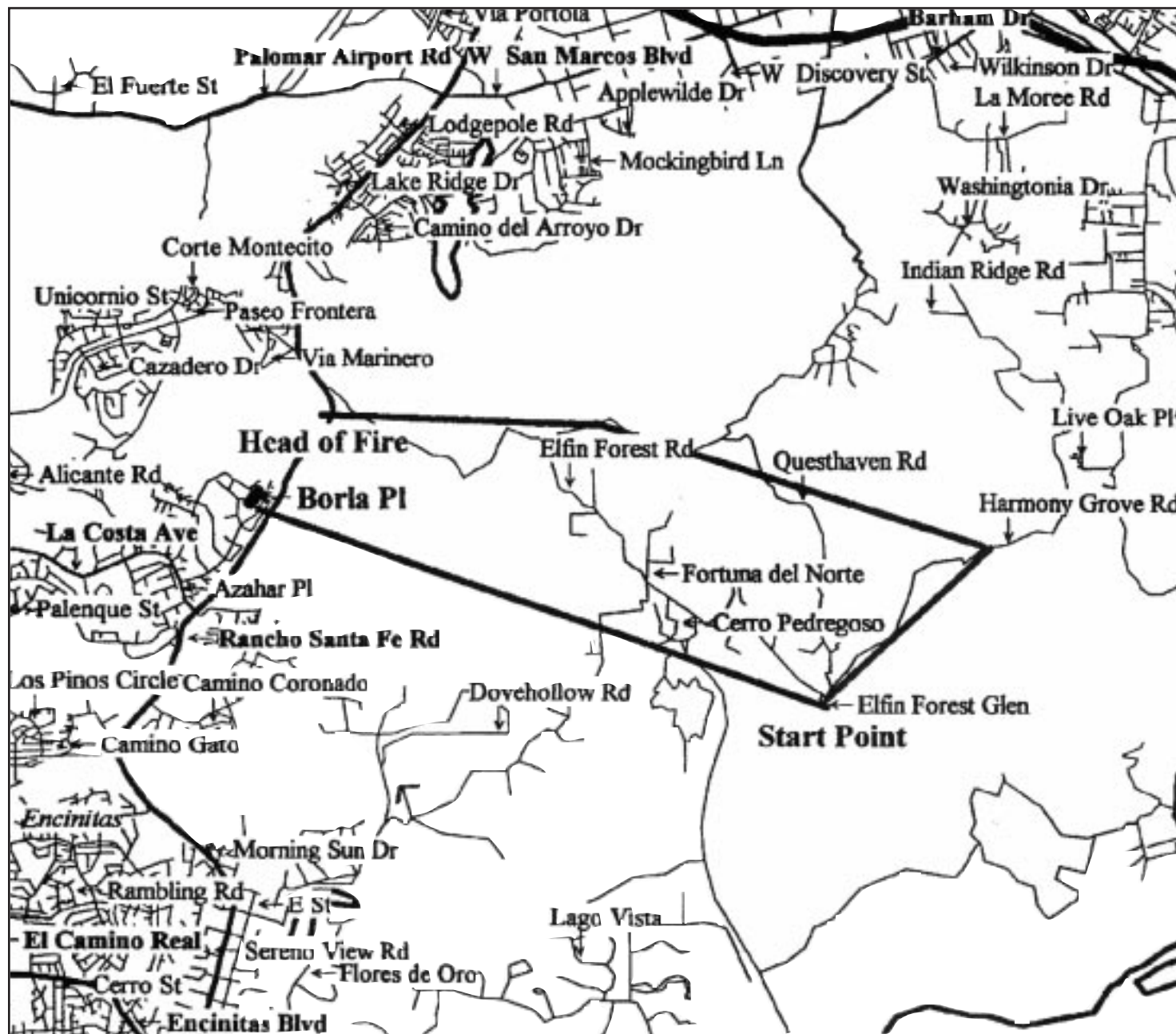
4:55 PM Hilliard assembles a strike team at the intersection of Elfin Forest and Questhaven Roads.

5:05 PM The fire is 3 hours and 12 minutes old. It has destroyed approximately 2,000 acres in unincorporated county areas.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1996, 5:06 PM: THE HARMONY GROVE FIRE MOVES INTO CARLSBAD

5:06 PM Carlsbad dispatch receives a report of a brush fire

HARMONY GROVE FIRE AREA



Shortly before 4:00 pm, CDF requested an engine from Carlsbad. A few minutes later, Rancho Santa Fe Fire requested two more. After discussing the subject with Chief Van Der Maaten, who was already initiating a callback of all personnel, Hilliard dispatched the units.

Hilliard and Captain Chris Heiser left to view the fire from the La Costa area, at the top of Alga Road and Unicornio. Just as they pulled up to this elevated vantage point, Hilliard was designated the Carlsbad “agency rep” to the newly established Unified Command and dispatched to Elfin Forest.

Repeatedly blocked by the fire in their journey to Elfin Forest, Hilliard and Heiser linked up with similarly impeded engines from Carlsbad and other jurisdictions on their way to connect with forming strike teams, and then with a CDF officer who directed the resources to return to Elfin Forest, where they worked under the direction of Carlsbad’s Brian Watson.

By 5:30 pm, Hilliard would be on his way back to Carlsbad in response to an urgent request for “immediate need” in La Costa.

Boxed In ...
The Fire Invaded Carlsbad With A Vengeance

Four hundred and seven 911 calls were received in Carlsbad within the first few hours of the fire's dramatic entrance into the city. Of those, the 5:06 pm telephone report of a brush fire in the area of La Costa Avenue and Camino de los Coches, in the southeast quadrant of the city, was the call portending a malevolent night ahead.

Carlsbad Fire Department Acting Battalion Chief Kevin Crawford, a 14-year veteran, responded immediately to the call with two brush vehicles and seven firefighters. En route, realizing the immensity of the potential danger, Crawford requested deployment of another engine and inquired about the availability of strike teams. (A strike team consists of five like engines [brush or structure] with personnel and one chief.) He was notified that the Fire Chief had already requested five Type I strike teams.

Arriving at the scene, Crawford observed what he indicated in his report was a “small volume of fire approximately one-half mile from the intersection in light fuel with a 20 mph northeast wind.” Recalling the situation later, he said, “When I saw the spot fire as I pulled up to the intersection at La Costa and Rancho Santa Fe, I was unsure if this was a new fire we were dispatched to or part of the Harmony Grove fire. After sending one engine north on Rancho Santa Fe and the other east on La Costa, I saw the fire coming at us in a southerly direction and realized it was the Harmony Grove fire. I knew we had a big one on our hands.”

A very big one, indeed; soon the wind would shift diabolically to the west, making mincemeat of possible strategies, forcing Crawford et al to toss tactics out the window and “throw everything we had at the fire.”

Crawford quickly called upon the police to begin evacuations and established a command post at the intersection of La Costa Avenue and Rancho Santa Fe Road. (Initially, the post was the City’s Chevrolet Suburban, the very same pickup upon which Governor Pete Wilson would lean the next morning as he signed the state’s Declaration of Emergency.)

The fight against the fire in Carlsbad had begun. Getting much worse before it got better, the battle would not end until early the next morning.

located east of Stagecoach Park, 4320 Camino de los Coches, near the access road east of the water towers. The wind direction is designated at northeast to southwest. Crews are dispatched immediately.

5:10 PM One crew begins structure protection at the highly threatened area of Sitio Baya. Termed Division A, this crew is assigned to follow the south flank of the fire. Division B will be dispatched to La Costa Avenue and Camino de los Coches. Division B will conduct structure protection on Esfera and Cadencia Streets, while a third unit, Division C, will be positioned on Cadencia Street near the intersection of Perdiz Street.

5:10 PM The Carlsbad Fire Department establishes a La Costa Command Post at Rancho Santa Fe Road and La Costa Avenue.

5:13 PM The fire is reported to be 1/8 mile from La Costa Hills Apartments, 3475 Caminito Sierra, and is said to be “large.”



A Prescription For Chaos

With other fires raging locally and regionally, resources were scarce and Carlsbad dispatch reported that no strike teams were available. Meanwhile, the fire situation expanded and exploded. One division began reconnaissance on Rancho Santa Fe Road north of La Costa Avenue. When the police reported structures threatened in the area of La Costa Avenue and Camino de los Coches, structure protection went into gear.

Arriving on the scene, Captain Joe Harden and crew were directed to Sitio Baya, where the fire was burning right up to stucco homes with tile roofs. In the midst of water and fire-retardant air drops, he would soon see the wind shift and know that they were in for a long night.

"I watched a piece of wood fence fly over my head for 100 yards. The wind was that strong," he recalled. "Embers from wood siding and wood roofs ignited the brush up to 1,000 feet ahead of the main fire, preheating the fuel and starting spot fires. It was very stressful and it got more so; we couldn't get enough resources to our area and we couldn't get them quickly enough."

The firestorm fast became fiercely unmanageable. "I thought we were in front of it. Then I looked behind me and there was a house, three homes back, burning," recounted CDF Battalion Chief Chuck Howell in an October 27, 1996 article in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. In that same article, a smoked-out U-T reporter, Darlene Himmelspach, told of calling her editor from a cell phone to report she could hardly read the street signs or even see well enough to drive. A few minutes later she telephoned again, saying, "There's fire on both sides of the road and sparks are coming at my car."

Vista Fire Department Division Chief Tom Day, after being called in about 5:00 pm, was originally assigned to the Harmony Grove area. He never made it. The firestorm had just come over the hill into Carlsbad when he arrived at the Carlsbad command post.

"We had five engines coming from different places; we never ended up together," the 20-year veteran said. "We were immediately engulfed in flames. I commanded two strike teams, working the Fosca/Cadencia area. The fire was too fast for us. By the time we would respond to a location, it would have swept past us and be somewhere else."

Day's strike teams ended up assigned under the supervision of Carlsbad's Sonny Hilliard, who had confronted yet another fire zone on his way back to Carlsbad from Elfin Forest. Finally arriving at Cadencia Street, Hilliard met up with Carlsbad Battalion Chief Tom Dana, who had been assigned to Division B on Esfera/Cadencia streets, where several homes were on fire. Hilliard was assigned to supervise this division and Day's division, which was positioned on Cadencia near Perdiz Street.

Hilliard would remain at his stress-ridden site for 14 hours, directing structure protection and fire control operations in the area of Cadencia Street, from Rancho Santa Fe Road to La Costa Avenue; the eastern end of Esfera from Cadencia; and Fosca from Esfera to its eastern end. According to Hilliard's after-fire report, "Approximately 40 units from numerous strike teams engaged in firefighting within the two divisions. Forty-three single-family homes were totally destroyed by the fire with approximately two dozen suffering some fire damage. A two-unit condominium was also severely damaged by the fire on Camino de Aqua near Piragua Street."

After that assignment ended, Hilliard was reassigned to patrol and mop-up operations. Expanding at a later date on his report, Hilliard acknowledged that due to the magnitude of the fire, most of the operations during the night of October 21 had been mop-up efforts as well.

5:15 PM Police officers begin evacuating residents from the La Costa Hills Apartments.

5:18 PM Fire is reported overrunning the intersection of Questhaven and Elfin Forest Roads. A Carlsbad strike team is reassigned from that intersection to structure protection in Elfin Forest.

5:18 PM Police officers begin evacuating residents on a "Code 3" emergency basis in the Camino de los Coches/La Costa Avenue area of Carlsbad.

5:20 PM One Carlsbad fire crew remains with a San Diego Forestry Department (SDFD) strike team in Elfin Forest. It will later be reassigned to assist in structure protection in San Marcos.

5:20 PM The decision is made by Carlsbad City Manager Ray Patchett and Fire Chief Dennis Van Der Maaten to open the Emergency Operating Center (EOC) at the Carlsbad Safety Center.

CEMAT CEMENTED CITY EFFORTS IN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

As has been proven on battlefields throughout history, a small, knowledgeable cadre of dedicated people can be more successful than a large, disjointed group.

The Carlsbad Emergency Management Administrative Team (CEMAT) is small in number but huge in terms of responsibilities. The six employees who comprised CEMAT during the fall of 1996 shared years of experience and a wealth of expertise. They were: Frank Boensch, Management; Patty Cratty, Public Works; Bobbie Hoder, Planning; Hillary Hogan, Finance; Ken Price, Logistics; and Division Chief Mike Smith, Operations.

CEMAT's mission is to provide leadership in preparing for and responding to extraordinary emergencies, by updating the emergency plan, training staff, developing recovery procedures and directing hazard mitigation efforts. It plans for everything needed during and after an emergency, from on-site security to street sweeping, storm drain cleaning and sandbagging; from temporary ordinances and tree trimming to public information, portable toilets and permits.

In one of many ironic twists to the firestorm of 1996, the CEMAT team was thick in the process of revising the emergency plan just as the fire began in Harmony Grove. Also on the agenda was an early November class on Emergency Exercise Design to be presented by the Office of Disaster Preparedness.

In notifying department heads of the training, City Manager Ray Patchett had stated, "Preparation of an emergency plan accounts for only 20% of the success formula for emergency preparedness ... classroom training for about 30%. Exercises provide the 'hands-on' experience, the most powerful learning method, and account for nearly 50%."

October 21 was destined to be about as 'hands-on' as any experience could be.



"The fire was beyond the control of man," Hilliard believed. "It had gone from one heavily populated area to another. When it came out of Box Canyon, it simply was not defensible. The homes near the canyon were like the top of the chimney; several went up in flames simultaneously and others were ignited by brands. We did everything we could to restrict losses to the houses already on fire, positioning engines between those homes and those not yet on fire. Once a home was on fire, nothing we could do would save the home, so we put our resources where we had a chance."

Stressing that these critical triage decisions are based not on emotions, monetary value or other arbitrary factors, Hilliard explained that each choice was not only difficult, but made in the heat of battle. Efforts were concentrated by individual homes, sides of streets and entire streets.

The City Battled Back

While Unified Command deployed engines and firefighters to protect houses from the advancing fire, wheels were put in motion to fight the fight on an organizational basis. Shortly before 5:00 pm, Division Chief Mike Smith, who had been monitoring the progression of the fire, told Chief Van Der Maaten, "If the wind holds, the fire will probably hit Encinitas. If it changes and heads north, we'll have problems here in Carlsbad."

Within minutes, the wind did just that. The command post became engulfed in smoke, and fire officials knew they had a huge problem on their hands.

Exacerbating the problem was the radio communications system. Its inadequacies would become painfully apparent as the night wore on. Kevin Crawford recalled, "The Fire Chief called me about the EOC and asked me to call him back on the cellular phone, but the lines were already jammed and I couldn't get through."

Chief Van Der Maaten called Carlsbad City Manager Ray Patchett at City Hall about 5:20 pm, telling him, "The winds have shifted. We're gonna get hit and we're gonna get hit hard." Agreeing with Van Der Maaten that the Emergency Operating Center (EOC) needed to be opened right away, Patchett immediately headed out to the Safety Center.

He recalled, "I was driving on Tamarack and saw the entire back part of the city on fire. I realized we had a serious problem and began contacting key people as I drove. We opened the EOC and I began preparing a Declaration of Emergency."

By proclaiming the Declaration, as he would do at 6:25 pm, Ray Patchett set in motion a complex hierarchy that would result in county, state and finally federal declarations enabling Carlsbad and its citizens to obtain assistance.

Stagecoach Park Became The Hub

The Unified Incident command post was established in the community center building at Stagecoach Park, located in the heart of the fire area. Decisions, deployments, planning and other centralized activities directed by the CDF-led management team originated at that facility.

The base camp was installed in spacious Stagecoach Park as well. It was here that weary firefighters would take quick breaks to eat and rest, and that post-fire demobilization would occur.

5:27 PM Fire dispatch requests immediate assistance at the Park La Costa Apartments, 3393 Calle Cancuna. Police begin evacuating the complex.

5:28 PM Ray Patchett arrives at the Safety Center and assumes his EOC position as Director of Emergency Services.

5:29 PM Police officers note the presence of flaming embers as they traverse the area "banging on doors."

5:30 PM Firefighters on the scene report that structures are being threatened in the area around the apartment complex.

5:30 PM Chief Van Der Maaten requests five type 1 (structure protection) strike teams through mutual aid.

5:30 PM All EOC personnel are ordered to report to the Carlsbad Safety Center.

5:35 PM Carlsbad street crews are called in to set up roadblocks to control incoming traffic on La Costa Avenue and Alga Road.

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LIKE A CITY WITHIN A CITY ...

THE EMERGENCY OPERATING CENTER PROVIDED THE HEARTBEAT OF THE CITY'S RESPONSE

Precisely three weeks before the fire, Carlsbad Mayor Claude ("Bud") Lewis used his regular column in the *Sun*, a local newspaper, to discuss emergency preparedness, explaining why, when and how the city's Emergency Operating Center (EOC) operates. He ended the column by encouraging readers to learn "how you as an individual may become better prepared for an emergency situation."

Little did he or anyone know how soon that information would become indispensable.

The EOC is designed to mobilize efficiently and utilize to the fullest the years of experience, wide-ranging expertise and sincere commitment of key city staff charged with the responsibility of responding with speed and skill to an emergency. Staff and resources can be utilized effectively and activities can be coordinated without omission or duplication, through face-to-face interaction.

Under law, in the event of a disaster, all city employees automatically are transformed into disaster service workers. Once an emergency is declared, as it was in Carlsbad at 6:25 pm on October 21, 1996, the City Council becomes the Disaster Council. In his capacity as Director of Emergency Services, the City Manager declares the proclamation, which must be subsequently ratified by the Council. Basically, the City Manager handles the emergency operations while the Council secures state and/or federal assistance to aid in the recovery process.

AN EMBER AWAY FROM THE FIRE

Carlsbad's EOC was located at the Public Safety and Service Center, near the intersection of Faraday and El Camino Real. With municipal offices dispersed throughout the city, centralized management assured a coordinated response by

decision-makers, emergency service personnel and representatives from related organizations.

The EOC relied on an Incident Command System (mirroring the larger CDF ICS), managing five activities: Management, Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance. Headed by City Manager Ray Patchett, in October 1996 Carlsbad's EOC Management consisted of department heads who guided the overall strategy of the response teams. Operations was staffed by employees from the first-response departments of Police, Fire and Utilities/Maintenance. Staff in Planning, Logistics and Finance were people familiar with those functions in their everyday jobs.

As examples, Assistant to the City Manager Lori Lieberman functioned in a command capacity; Housing and Redevelopment Director Evan Becker worked with shelter operations; and Fleet Operations Manager Larry Willey focused his efforts on Logistics. In all, three dozen staff functioned as EOC workers that night. Some left homes that they were not sure would be there when they returned.

EOC members procured food, fuel and supplies for firefighters and related personnel; staffed fire and police positions to provide security for evacuated areas and to maintain adequate police and fire emergency response capabilities to other areas of the city; supported Red Cross efforts; served as a liaison to the media; conducted damage assessment; tracked emergency purchasing documents and managed volunteer resources.

THEY HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

Assistant City Manager Frank Mannen, who had observed the fire while driving home at 5:30 pm, re-routed to the Safety Center. He and Division Chief Mike Smith, as the first two on the

scene, quickly began unfolding tables, setting up equipment and establishing a full-scale center.

The EOC was functioning smoothly within one hour of its 6:00 pm opening. Logistics procured food to feed 200 people and fuel for 50 units. Operations established shelters (that thankfully turned out not to be needed). Astute employees in Planning gained information themselves instead of waiting for official reports, enabling rapid reconnaissance and intelligence. Finance quickly developed emergency personnel time cards. A multitude of other details was handled by people operating in sync like intricate pieces of an efficiently functioning machine.

Police Chief Vales described the initial scenario: "Upon arriving at EOC headquarters a little after 6:00 pm, I observed an incomparable level of activity in the communications section. All 911 lines were activated as dispatchers prioritized emergency calls, advised citizens, handled police and fire radio transmissions and managed the call-out of personnel." In addition to the hundreds of emergency calls, nearly 1,000 other calls were received during the first six hours of the fire.

Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) reported rapidly to the scene. Personnel maintained continuous radio contact with private citizens and public agencies throughout the EOC's operation. While everyone calmly tackled their emergency responsibilities, a glance out the door at flames on the ridge barely three miles away provided a vivid reminder of why they were there.

Communications with outside agencies were conducted on a one-to-one basis. Mannen personally contacted the superintendent of each school district in Carlsbad, asking for assistance. Mannen reported, "Each of them told me, without

hesitation, 'If you need it, you'll have it.'"

"We had planned for an emergency, but nothing is like the real thing," recalled Fire Department Administrative Secretary Fam Garza, who like many other employees worked straight through from Monday morning until Tuesday evening. "It was exciting to see the EOC in operation, with everyone coming together to do their jobs so efficiently," she stated, explaining that her recording duties kept her constantly busy. "I served as scribe, posting all the events as they occurred on a large board that could be seen by all in the room. The information coming in from so many sources was non-stop, and all of it was vital."

In interviews conducted after the event, EOC members praised the group's efficiency. Several noted how pleasantly surprised they had been to discover that despite the many supervisors and staff from various departments coming together to share the work load, "no egos were involved."

Workers commented that City Council members observed without interfering; no one refused to take on any task; no one panicked; everyone knew their jobs and stuck with them. In other words, the EOC had met its goal as foreseen by Mayor Lewis 21 days before the event, to "ease the impact or burden on the citizens of Carlsbad."

Just as important to the efforts during, and especially after, the fire were the hundreds of Carlsbad employees who continued operating at their regular work sites. Ray Patchett spoke directly to these employees in a December 1996 city newsletter, lauding the "hundreds of city employees who played another crucial role in this emergency. You are the people who kept the service to the citizens flowing even though a huge part of the city workforce was focused on responding to and cleaning up after the emergency. You paid the bills, checked out the books, maintained the streets and parks, answered questions, and carried on the hundreds of other services the city must provide on a daily basis."

CALM IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM ... RECOLLECTIONS OF BOBBIE HODER; EOC/CEMAT PLANNING

"While working on CEMAT disaster training material on Monday afternoon, I kept an eye on the fire in Harmony Grove, then returned to my home in La Costa. I was planning on attending a Patrons of the Arts board meeting that evening, but a little after 6:00 pm I realized the fire's proximity to my neighborhood and decided I'd better evacuate.

"Within minutes, I gathered important papers, pictures and a few clothes. I decided the rest was expendable. By 6:30, I was in my car heading down Alga Road through immense smoke and traffic toward El Camino Real. It took me 30 minutes to get to the bottom of the hill.

"While in my car, I called [Planning Director] Michael Holzmiller, who lives nearby. He was wondering whether to evacuate. I saw the hill not far from his house burst into flames and I told him yes, you should. Michael put his dog in the car and left."

5:36 PM Police officers begin evacuating residents on Sitio Baya.

5:37 PM Rancho Santa Fe Road is reported to be blocked by fire.

5:38 PM Fire officials confirm with police officers that evacuations are under way.

5:40 PM Homes in the area of the Sitio Baya cul-de-sac are reported to be threatened.

5:47 PM All of Calle Gavanzo is evacuated.

5:48 PM Police officers conduct traffic control at Rancho Santa Fe Road/La Costa Avenue.

5:50 PM Carlsbad Police Captain Jim Hawks advises Streets Superintendent Chuck Mitchell to initiate a recall of department employees to stage equipment.

5:51 PM Police officers check a private street off Esfera Street to provide evacuation assistance.

5:51 PM Residents in the area of Rancho Santa Fe Road and La Costa Avenue are reported to be panicking. Fire officials request an evacuation site.

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Her emergency designation is Food Coordinator, but around the EOC that night, Carlsbad Senior Center Coordinator Sue Spickard was affectionately known simply as "Food Sue." As a member of the EOC team since its inception, Sue had prepared for a citywide contingency years in advance by sending a survey to local food purveyors. Although the response was lukewarm in terms of businesses replying, the survey provided a starting point for Sue, who after viewing TV reports of the fire at home, was one of the first workers to arrive at the EOC.

The wheels were put into motion at breakneck speed. "I learned the City Manager had just declared a local emergency and that my Food Unit should immediately begin preparing to feed 250 firefighters in the field and emergency personnel here at the Safety Center."

As fast as she could get to the phones (which were being connected even as Spickard planned her course of action), list in hand, to start contacting food suppliers, many began calling her. Shortly after the emergency had been declared, Boston Market had attempted to deliver food to an outside shelter, but was turned down. A radio volunteer put the Boston Market driver in cell phone contact with Sue, who asked him to

bring the food to the base camp being established at Stagecoach Park. Trying to make his way through the winding, smoke-filled streets, the driver was directed to the park via a circuitous but safe route by EOC member Keith Beverly, who was familiar with the area.

According to Food Sue, "At one point, the driver yelled, 'There's a wall of fire in front of me!' Keith matter-of-factly advised, 'Well, turn around!'"

Undaunted by the experience, Boston Market fed the firefighters at Stagecoach Park that night and in fact were prepared to feed them the next day as well, but by that time CDF had set up an on-site kitchen. Instead, tired and ravenous support workers received the benefit of Boston Market's continuing largesse, enjoying tasty chicken lunches while attending to a myriad of recuperative efforts on Tuesday, October 22.

Shortly after the fire struck Carlsbad, Red Lobster of San Diego called to say it had learned of the disaster and was on its way with sandwiches and sodas. Showing they didn't just make hero sandwiches, but were the real thing, the employees of La Costa Togo's offered to stay open and make sandwiches until their inventory ran out. While fixing the food, Togo's staff contacted vendors to arrange early deliveries of

supplies so they could continue providing needed food.

A small business with a huge heart, That Pizza Place in Carlsbad came through big time during the crisis. After indicating that he didn't have the authority to offer food, an employee called owner Mike Pfankuch at home. Mike not only authorized the request, but immediately returned to the restaurant to make the pizzas himself. When asked why he was so enthusiastic to contribute, he replied, "It's something I think everybody in the community should do. Helping each other ... that's what life's all about."

As the night went on, the emergency continued to spark assistance, with even large corporations cutting through red tape as fast as embers igniting a wood shake roof. Asked to help with the gathering and loading of bottled water and other vital supplies, the manager of the local Albertson's Market accepted an emergency P.O., saying, "Just write it on a scrap of paper. I'll take anything."

Anything and everything was generously offered and gratefully accepted during that first night and in the aftermath of the event. Aviara Four Seasons made lunches; Hungry Hunter offered to cook at the fire site; Top of the Bagel, Pea Soup Anderson's and Horizon

Christian Church said they would cook for the firefighters; Farmer's Insurance offered to shuttle food providers to and fro.

City staffers left their homes to join together in the provisions effort as well. The Fleet Maintenance yard became a one-stop "fuel 'n' food" shop as employees handed out victuals to the firefighters and police officers passing through to gas up. Senior Center staff responded to the call-in at the outset by coming in to collect the coffee, ice, coolers, utensils and other supplies needed for food delivery.

Fire employees not on the front lines helped shore up the firefighters on those lines. Carol Burke, Colleen Balch and Martín Aguilera made several food runs between restaurants and Stagecoach Park. "We also took sandwiches and water directly to the firefighters immersed in the event. Some of them hadn't eaten at all until we arrived," recalled Carol Burke. "We knew we weren't in any danger from the fire, but being able to help out in this capacity was really exciting and gratifying."

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CDF's ability quickly to install a self-sufficient staging area proved to be a great advantage in the multi-jurisdictional crisis. The team's organizational chart mirrored each city's own Emergency Operations Center setup, with specific sections for Command/Management, Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance. The organization enabled emergency personnel from each agency to share input and participation in an organized manner.

According to Carlsbad Division Chief Mike Smith, the only drawback to Stagecoach Park proved to be the site's proximity to a residential area. Along with the problems created by the fire, school and commuter traffic as well as construction on Alga Road added to the area's congestion in the days to follow.

Police And Street Personnel Provided Vital Support

Within 30 minutes of the initial report of fire in Carlsbad, Streets Superintendent Chuck Mitchell was reached at home on his vacation day. He immediately reported to the command post, and coordinating with police officers already present, began support operations. Under Mitchell's supervision, Streets Supervisor Greg Woods directed a crew of workers setting roadblocks on La Costa Avenue and Alga Road. A massive traffic jam began to back up La Costa Avenue while motorcycle officers drove down side streets telling people to evacuate.

The situation was difficult and potentially tumultuous, Mitchell recalled. "The crews were surrounded in a sea of commotion. In addition to maneuvering between distraught residents trying to get into their neighborhoods and equally agitated residents trying to evacuate, the workers were forced to deal with a growing mob of in-the-way looky-loos. Despite it all, the work continued as smoothly as possible," stated Mitchell, "thanks to the expertise of seasoned veterans and the demeanor of each employee."

As Chuck Mitchell was being contacted at home, Police Chief Robert Vales was being brought up to date by Police Captain Jim Hawks. The deployment of all police officers was effected, including off duty staff and senior volunteers. With the help of the Oceanside Police Department, San Diego Sheriffs' Department, State Parks Police and California Highway Patrol, the staff pursued its primary responsibility of safely evacuating residents.

Ironically, Police Captain George Suttle had the task of evacuating himself. "I had to hose down my roof and move all my valuables. Then I got in the car and came to the EOC."

Police Activities Expanded To Keep Pace With The Fire

Shortly after 6:00 pm, 22 officers and reserves and four field supervisors were deployed on the front lines. The fast-moving, unpredictable nature of the westerly advancing fire necessitated door-to-door evacuations, some of them perilously time-consuming.

In addition to dealing with several residents who were reluctant (some vehemently so) to leave their homes, the police were called upon to help many elderly, handicapped and disabled people in the fire neighborhoods. At the height of the fires, 70 officers were active in the field.

In addition to evacuating scores of residents, securing and protecting open, safe, usable roadways for egress, and controlling entry/re-entry into extremely hazardous areas, officers were confronted with many unforeseen emergencies. These included addressing the needs of special care residential facilities in the area and the possibility of a sizable airborne chlorine hazardous material accident (that fortunately did not transpire) at a water treatment facility at La Costa Meadows.

- 5:53 PM** A Carlsbad fire crew begins structure protection for homes backing Rancho Santa Fe Road in Carlsbad.
- 5:54 PM** Palm trees are reported on fire and falling on the Park La Costa Apartment complex.
- 5:55 PM** Strike team units are being directed to Camino de los Coches near the Rancho Santa Fe Road/La Costa Avenue intersection.
- 5:56 PM** Evacuations are reported to be nearly complete at the Park La Costa Apartments.
- 6:00 PM** The EOC is open and operating, with personnel either at the Safety Center or on their way.
- 6:00 PM** Chief Van Der Maaten requests ten additional Type 1 strike teams.
- 6:01 PM** Police officials report on evacuations to Stagecoach Park and refer to the number of onlookers in the area: "A whole lot of people are here."
- 6:05 PM** A vehicle is reported on fire at Calle Timiteo/La Costa Avenue.

EXCERPTS FROM AN AFTER-ACTION REPORT FROM POLICE LIEUTENANT DON LEWIS

SYNOPSIS: Shortly after 1700 hours, on October 21, 1996, an uncontained brush fire originating in the Harmony Grove area of San Diego County began a rapid, wind-aided advance toward the southeast quadrant of the city of Carlsbad. Very strong seasonal Santa Ana winds, ample dry brush for fuel, and a topography comprised primarily of hillsides, canyons and valleys, combined to provide all the ingredients necessary for a firestorm of a magnitude not previously encountered by public safety responders in this city.

PLANNING: Initial tactical considerations were the immediate protection of life through notifications and evacuations. The breadth and advance of the fire was such that on-duty personnel were quickly overwhelmed.

Priorities were established and formed the general operating objectives as follows:

- 1) support life and property protection activities of field personnel to include staffing needs of fire command and law enforcement upon request, provide and procure supplies/logistics as needed;
- 2) maintain adequate police and fire emergency response capabilities to other areas of the city through mutual aid and off-duty personnel staffing;
- 3) provide security for evacuated areas;
- 4) provide all available information to the public through regularly scheduled media briefings and via our fire command public information officer; and
- 5) further develop field intelligence and damage assessment.

MEDIA COVERAGE: Based upon early indications that the fire would be unusually devastating, the department was constantly contacted throughout the event and the following days by media personnel nationwide. The firestorm received exceptional coverage from the local media.

ONE CARLSBAD HOUSE NEEDED A FEW GOOD MEN ... IT GOT THREE OF THE BEST

Three young Camp Pendleton marines were on their way to rent a movie when they saw the fire in La Costa. "Let's go!" was the split-second decision made by the trio of lance corporals.

Arriving on Cadencia Street, they spotted a house with a roof on fire. Daniel Pershing climbed onto the roof and tried to put out the flames with a garden hose, but water pressure was nil. Lance Owens got up on the roof with Pershing, and Joshua Richardson handed them a fire extinguisher. (The gripping scene would be replayed in print and on TV across the nation in the days to follow.)

When the fire extinguisher proved insufficient against the flames, the Marines ran inside the house and up into the attic, noticing family pictures on the way. "I thought, if we don't do something, this family is not going to have a house," said Pershing, describing their motivation.

The marines broke through the attic, a firefighter handed them a fire truck hose and the home was saved. The young men were "adopted" by the family whose home they had saved, and went on to become weekend members of San Pasqual Volunteer Fire Department.

When asked if they would do anything differently if they had it to do all over again, a publicity-weary Owens remarked, "I would definitely make sure I wouldn't get my picture taken next time."

While police-directed street closures and traffic control continued, as more structures became involved, street crews, tow trucks, SDG&E emergency crews and other resources were activated. Many of these workers, like the firefighters and police officers, would pursue their high-stress responsibilities long into the night and the next morning, with little or no relief for up to 40 hours. Among these were Fleet Mechanic Ed Barr, who evacuated his family from their La Costa home before returning to work through the night.

The Fire Chief himself was not immune. His wife had been forced to evacuate their home while her husband worked through the night and all the next day. It's no wonder that on October 22, a fatigued Dennis Van Der Maaten, despite having fought major fires in his career, would begin his report to the City Council by confiding, "My brain feels like scrambled eggs."

A Sea Of Flames

The only predictable aspect of the Harmony Grove fire's rampage through Carlsbad was its continuing unpredictability. The pivotal phenomenon occurred right after 6:00 pm, when the fire jumped Box Canyon and began its inexorable march into Carlsbad. It was then that Carlsbad firefighters realized they were overwhelmed.

Division Chief Mike Smith acknowledged, "At first we believed we could contain the fire, even with regional resources spread thin and scarce. Then right after 6:10 pm the wind changed direction and speed ... making a 90-degree turn ... blowing now from the southeast to the northwest ... shifting dramatically."

The situation progressed from bad to worse. Fire hydrants lost water pressure, and Carlsbad Municipal Water District crews were called out to boost the pressure. Weary dispatchers received hard-to-decipher reports from out-of-breath firefighters. Carlsbad continued vying for resources siphoned off to other regions or too distant to respond in time.

Powerful gusts of Santa Ana winds generated tiny tornadoes of flames that gave flight to embers, enabling them to jump roads and hurdle over firebreaks. Rushing to attack the blaze, which was beginning its attack on the luxury homes overlooking the La Costa Resort and Spa, Fire Captain Don Krepps realized, "Even if we had 100 engines here, we wouldn't have been able to stop the fire from coming over the hill."

Observers described embers "as big as two-by-fours" and "the size of footballs" falling out of the sky; being picked up and carried by the wind, igniting roofs and burning homes and cars. Cadencia, Esfera and Fosca were among the hardest hit streets. According to an October 22 *North County Times* report, "Firefighters did not even attempt to douse six houses on Bajo Court, preferring instead to concentrate on houses that had not yet caught fire."

Air tankers and helicopters dumped water and chemical retardant in the path of the blaze, but when night fell, darkness coupled with wind speed grounded the aircraft. Nothing could stop the wind. Indeed, the fire created its own wind, elevating it at times to storm speeds of over 60 and 70 mph.

Communications within and between divisions and agencies became exceedingly difficult. "We lost two transmitter sites," recalled Chief Van Der Maaten, who before and after the fire was the premier champion of the new regional 800 MHz radio communications system. "Different agencies, even within the same city, were on different radios. There were only two local frequencies and two or three state frequencies; it was like putting hundreds of people on a party line. For one agency to talk to another, you had to go through dispatch, which was inundated with calls. Since you couldn't speak to others directly, you never knew if your message got through."

- 6:05 PM The wind and fire travel change direction, to northwest.
- 6:06 PM "A lot of fire" is reported "coming over from Vallecitos fire dam."
- 6:08 PM Streets crews begin setting up barricades in the Camino de los Coches/Rancho Santa Fe Road area.
- 6:10 PM The Carlsbad command post at Rancho Santa Fe Road/La Costa Avenue becomes engulfed in flames.
- 6:10 PM A vehicle in a carport is reported burning in the Cadencia area.
- 6:12 PM EOC establishes communications with the command post and Fire Emergency Dispatch.
- 6:13 PM Police officers conduct evacuations to the west of Stagecoach Park, at Via Colema, Sitio Baya, Calle del Sur, Calle Odessa and other streets.
- 6:14 PM Aviara Oaks Elementary School is selected as a possible Red Cross shelter.

NO CAPE, BUT HE HAD THE HEROICS DOWN-PAT ... MAN WHO REFUSED TO LEAVE HIS ROOF SAVED HIS HOUSE

By day, a mild-mannered chief financial officer for a San Diego security products manufacturer, on the night of October 21, Pat Luedke became an adrenaline-driven superhero single-handedly keeping the fire at bay from his 3334 Cadencia Street home for hours until the professionals finally arrived.

"I've lived here for nine years. This house is a part of me," the 41-year-old defiantly told TV reporters on the scene, whose cameras captured the cinder-haired, soot-shirted portrait that caused his father in Minneapolis, seeing the image on a national news show the next day, to call Pat and inquire in amazement, "Son, was that you?"

Luedke's epic evening began when he arrived home from work that Monday at 4:30 pm. He saw fire in the distance across Rancho Santa Fe Road. Changing into jeans and a Chargers jersey, he got out a ladder and climbed onto his wood shake roof to watch the fire as it headed west, toward his neighborhood. He had put fire retardant on the shingles six months before; ironically as a cosmetic touch-up, not a fire preventive measure.

No one else seemed wary of the approaching fire. Luedke's wife and five-year-old son were ready to go out for pizza and watch the Chargers game on a big-screen TV, but Pat said, "No, let's wait" and began wetting down his roof.

By a little after 5:00 pm, the fire was halfway down the hill. Luedke's neighbors were gathering, along with hordes of looky-loos, on Rancho Santa Fe Road, but few were concerned. "You're wasting your time up there," said one resident as she strolled past to join the gawkers. Within two hours of that remark, the woman unfortunately would lose her home, and her dog trapped within it.

"The wind was going about 20 mph and the fire was heading toward Encinitas," recalled

Luedke. "Then the wind picked up and the fire suddenly switched, heading straight toward us. It jumped the road. Flames were 40 feet high. The tile-roofed house on the corner (Cadencia/Rancho Santa Fe) is what saved us all from going up in smoke right away."

By now, two other homeowners were up on their roofs. (A few weeks after the fire, one of the men died of a heart attack.) Noticing his next-door neighbor's house on fire, Luedke asked a man renting a house down the street to grab a hose and get up on the burning roof. He did. All four determined amateurs began battling cinders as big as grapefruit flying through the air and landing in a fury, igniting shingles. (Three of those four homes survived the blaze.)

Once the houses around the corner on Esfera caught on fire, the other roof-top residents fled. Luedke remained.

By now, the neighborhood was in a frenzy of fear, with no fire engines or firefighters in sight. The police were out in force, however, evacuating families.

"Get off your roof. The whole neighborhood's burning down," one officer shouted at Luedke, who adamantly refused to leave. The officer repeated his order with vigor. "I'll have to arrest you!"

Luedke replied, "You'll have to come up here to do it!"

Reflecting on the exchange several months later, a normally law-abiding Luedke still displayed elements of the adrenaline that drove him that night. "I was not going to let my house burn down."

The fire had other notions. At one point, Luedke guessed he had 200 cinders on his roof. He stepped on some, hosed out others, and prayed that the weak water pressure would hold until the

fire engines arrived, which he estimated they did not do until at least 7:00 or 8:00 pm.

Their dogs safely ensconced in their van down the street, Luedke's wife, Linda, carried their wildly frightened son in her arms. Spotting fire on their back lawn, Pat yelled at Linda to get a hose and put it out. Putting her son in the arms of an empathetic TV reporter, Lee Ann Kim, Linda grabbed a hose, then looked up at her husband and saw his hair on fire, then his shirt. With relative calm, Pat used his hose to put out the flames and continued attacking the cinders raining down on the roof.

Finally, Escondido Fire Engine #1 pulled up in the driveway. Firefighter John Fryday told Luedke, "Get off the roof. You're in danger. Your house is on fire. We're going to let it go."

The attic was indeed inflamed. Luedke did not have the water pressure to stop that fire, or the one on his back fence or the one over his game room. Mini-tornadoes of flame rose 50 feet in the air around him. The eucalyptus trees kitty-corner to his home were burning like birthday candles, ready to fall at any minute directly on top of him. Fryday continued to shout at him. Yet Luedke did not, would not, could not leave his roof.

Finally, Luedke watched firefighters drag a huge fire hose through his gate and up onto the roof. Fryday went up. Luedke came down.

Ninety minutes passed. Luedke stood guard, watching Fryday at work. Fryday climbed down the ladder, telling Luedke he was leaving to help other areas on fire. Luedke climbed back up on his roof. He stayed there, protecting his home, putting out cinders, smelling burning plastic and shake, watching nearby homes smolder, until 6:00 am the next morning. A badly singed and terrified dog

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Summing up the tumultuous situation, the Chief explained, "If you can't communicate adequately in the field, you need face-to-face communication as if you were on a prehistoric battlefield. Without communications, everybody becomes a freelancer."

In addition to the communications problem was the issue of siphoned-off resources. CDF Battalion Chief Chuck Howell said that even though North County didn't get the resources requested, few local firefighters had left this area to fight fires elsewhere. Stressing that every available firefighter and engine fought the blaze and that everybody was utilized to the fullest, he said, "There was more fire than could be handled. I don't care how much equipment you put in there.... Having some more fire engines might have meant we could have saved another house or two, but I'm not sure it would have made much of a difference."

Describing the fire as ferocious, he added, "You can't put two or three fire engines in front of every house, and that's what it would have taken to stop the devastation we saw in this fire."

Carlsbad Captain Rick Fisher, a Carlsbad firefighter for 23 years, compared the situation to wartime triage. "We had to make hard choices, deciding which homes were beyond saving and which we had a chance to save."

When Fisher and his crew arrived at Esfera, the entire east side of the street was burning. They made a stand on the west side, where they saved all the homes.

Months later, the street had a lingering melancholy effect on Fischer. He told an interviewer, "I'll drive by and see some homes rebuilt and some a pile of rubble, just sitting there as a grim reminder of someone who lost everything and hasn't been able to recover."

Confusion Reigned

While firefighters fought the blaze, evacuations continued along Cadencia and side streets north of La Costa Avenue. Earlier in the day, Kimberly Cottam had served as host to friends forced to take refuge from their Elfin Forest home. Now, her friends accompanied her as the family evacuated Cottam's Carlsbad home.

According to hearsay accounts, some strange and horrible things happened. Seeing the fire fast approaching, one woman on Piragua Street was said to have loaded up her car in the garage, where she thought her pets and possessions would be safe from smoke until she was packed and ready to go. Before she could leave, the mechanism on her garage door began to melt. With the fire becoming a threat to her life, she fled on foot alone.

An elderly woman living smack dab in the heart of the hard-hit area had remained alone and thankfully safe in her luxury, tile-roofed custom home while her husband attended the Chargers game. She never evacuated, even when she heard homes exploding on the hill above her.

As residents evacuated and firefighters tried to save homes, many concerned citizens flocked to the Carlsbad libraries which, since they didn't close their doors until 9:00 pm, were the only city buildings normally open at night. Where was the fire headed? Were the roads passable? What areas were being evacuated? Where could people take/obtain emergency supplies?

Questions abounded, but unfortunately, the library staff didn't have many of the answers. Later, Assistant Library Director Geoff Armour admitted, "This caught us all by surprise. It's natural for people to call or go the library for information. But we didn't have the information."

- 6:15 PM The Carlsbad Fire Department requests an estimated time of arrival for the strike teams.
- 6:18 PM Fire is reported 10 feet away from homes near 7923 Avenida Diestro.
- 6:19 PM The California Highway Patrol sends a unit to the Olivenhain Municipal Water District plant at La Costa Meadows and Rancho Santa Fe Road to assess potential chemical problems.
- 6:21 PM More fire is reported on Avenida Diestro.
- 6:23 PM Police officers report structures in flames west of Stagecoach park.
- 6:24 PM Police officers report that the hillside north of Calle Odessa is on fire and that they are evacuating this area.
- 6:25 PM A Carlsbad strike team is deployed to the Cadencia area.
- 6:25 PM City Manager Ray Patchett declares a State of Local Emergency in Carlsbad.
- 6:30 PM A house is reported burning on Cadencia Street.

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from the burned-down neighbor's house took shelter in the corner of Luedke's back yard. His wife and child had evacuated to a friend's Oceanside home. SDG&E crews jackhammered the gas lines. Luedke did not even attempt to sleep.

"About 2:00 am, the propane tank on my neighbor's barbecue grill exploded. I looked up and saw the top of the grill flying at me, 50 feet in the air. Luckily it landed in my back yard," related Luedke, now chuckling at the notion of surviving a fire only to be killed by a flying grill.

Showing a visitor around almost one year after the fire, Luedke pointed with pride to his new roof: a Class A composite; "guaranteed not to burn." He observed that most of the rebuilt homes in his area now had concrete roofs, stuccoed exterior walls and eaves; no exposed wood.

Having learned not to rely on garden hoses, he put in a pool and sump pump. (One resident was said to have saved his own home and two others with the water in his pool and the pump he had purchased at a garage sale two weeks before the fire.) Luedke and Fryday kept up a relationship born out of an unforgettable night.

Luedke described his last-ditch plan for that evening: "I had positioned my motorcycle below me. I figured if the roof fell in, I'd jump off onto my Harley and ride away." In light of the superheroic efforts he'd already demonstrated over the previous few hours, that feat would not have surprised anyone.

Afterward, when people who heard that his home survived told him, "You were lucky," Pat Luedke grimly replied, "Luck had nothing to do with it."

LONGTIME COUNCIL MEMBER SHARED THE DRAMA IN HER NEIGHBORHOOD

Ann Kulchin had been a Carlsbad resident since 1978 and a member of the Carlsbad City Council since 1980. In planning for catastrophes on both a personal and professional level, she said, "I thought earthquake." When it turned out to be fire, she and her husband, Dave, were thrust into the thick of things.

"We evacuated our La Costa home. My husband took smart things: personal papers and a change of clothing. I trudged out with stupid stuff, lugging a huge, cumbersome family portrait in a heavy frame, which I later realized I could have easily replaced."

Evacuating to the Leucadia Water District facility, Ann Kulchin met up with friends and neighbors. The dramatic night sparked an emotional response, peaking as one by one, residents learned the status of their house.

"There were people there with us who lost their homes and people whose homes were spared. The internal turmoil was so intense that looking from face to face, you couldn't tell the difference."

The Fire's Final Hours

At approximately 10:00 pm, Assistant City Manager Frank Mannen in his capacity as public information officer announced to the media that 50 homes had been destroyed. "We're concentrating on evacuations now," he tersely told reporters. At this point, no one knew how long and how far the fire would burn.

The Fosca/Cadencia area had borne the brunt of the disaster. The northern end of Fosca Street was hit harder than most. In one two-block stretch, 17 homes were destroyed. Fire totalled 11 of the 14 homes at Fosca's northern cul-de-sac. Almost all had wood shake roofs. The owner of a house that survived at 3202 Fosca had installed a new fire-resistant roof just three weeks before the conflagration.

Many tile-roofed homes with sparse vegetation were spared. On one block, the lone shake-roofed house, at 7026 El Fuerte, burned. But even a tile roof was not a safe bet against a firestorm that could snake under the bottom of an eave and set the house aflame.

Terrain had played a role in the terror as well. Strike teams trying to reach Carlsbad from Elfin Forest had been delayed when the fire jumped Questhaven Road. Later, the steep topography of Box Canyon hampered fire control efforts. Once it had devoured Box Canyon, the fire claimed territory in a wide front stretching at one point from Palomar Airport Road to Encinitas Boulevard.

Eventually, the wind stopped, causing the fire to stop, too. After moving through the brush at a rate of 30-40 mph, destroying 54 Carlsbad homes and attacking several more structures, the heat production could not be sustained and the all-conquering fire finally lost its potency and power to destroy.

Pockets of flames and burning embers would live on for two more days. Fires would erupt on Tuesday morning in the Discovery Hills area of San Marcos, to be fought by firefighters weary from efforts during the long, hard day and night before.

By the time the Santa Ana winds relented near midnight on October 21, the fire had burned a total of 8,600 acres in Harmony Grove, La Costa, Olivenhain (Encinitas) and San Marcos. The fire was declared fully contained at 6:00 pm on October 23; fully controlled at 6:00 pm on October 24. (Containment means a fire is no longer spreading. Controlled means it is no longer burning.)

The Harmony Grove fire was out. But the repercussions were far from over.

Night Ended And Mourning Began

By the wee hours of Tuesday morning, a steady stream of cars with fatigued and often-frantic drivers poured down El Camino Real, Rancho Santa Fe Road, San Marcos Boulevard and other major streets. As police officers and sheriffs' deputies stood guard at major intersections using flares and flashlights to direct traffic, some residents drove in, then left with only the clothes on their backs, heading toward evacuation centers. Others packed vehicles with prized possessions. One car slowly made its way out of the fire zone with a piano on its hood.

A number of residents had gathered during the fire near the intersection of El Camino Real and La Costa Avenue. Some had taken turns calling their own homes, inferring that if their answering machines came on, their home still stood. Many listened in vain.

Returning home was a "surrealistic experience" for Pat Bleha. When she and her husband, Bill, had evacuated their 3209 Fosca home of 20 years, not a fire truck was in sight. "Smoke filled the air and a flaming

6:30 PM Carlsbad fire personnel conduct structure protection in the El Fuerte/Bolero Streets area.

6:30 PM Police officers conduct/continue evacuations on Sitio Baya, Rancho Santa Fe Road, Cadencia Street and Cabo Way; Dehesa Court and Cuesta Place; El Fuerte Street and Alicante Road; Alga Road and El Fuerte Street.

6:31 PM Fire is reported at Cadencia Street and Carpa Court.

6:31 PM A resident calls in to report fire at his home on 3334 Cadencia Street.

6:32 PM Crews in the Rancho Santa Fe Road/Cadencia Street area deploy to the above fires.

6:33 PM Fire is reported north of the command post.

6:34 PM Five structures are threatened and one or two are reported gone north of the command post.

6:36 PM Houses are reported on fire at Cabo Way.

6:36 PM Police are evaluating the situation at Dehesa Court.

IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT ... RECOLLECTIONS FROM THE FRONT

"EARLY ON, ONE OF MY BIGGEST FEARS WAS THAT SOMEONE WOULD GET HIT BY A CAR," said **Vista Fire Department Division Chief Tom Day** who led two strike teams under Carlsbad's Sonny Hilliard, recalling the chaotic early evening scene at the intersection of Rancho Santa Fe Road and La Costa Avenue.

"It was dark and we were engulfed in smoke. Visibility was severely limited. I think signals were out, too. Some folks were rushing home after work and others were trying to get out with their possessions, and people who didn't belong in the neighborhoods at all were coming to gawk. Police officers were directing traffic and firefighters were going in."

The surreal scenario became more bizarre when Chief Day entered the eye of the firestorm. "It was like snowflakes coming down, except these were embers landing on rooftops. We tried to stay ahead of the fire enough so that we could pick a salvageable home and save it. Once a firefighter was up on a roof trying to save a home, it was hard to get him to leave it, even when we knew it was lost. We tried to save homes that were on fire as well as homes that had not yet been caught, but so many were beyond saving," he explained.

"I saw firefighters working harder than they'd ever worked before. Without a break. For hours."

"THE WINDS WERE 70 MPH. FLAMES WERE BURNING PARALLEL TO THE GROUND. WATER PRESSURE WAS LOW. SEVEN ENGINES WERE THERE, FROM CDF, ESCONDIDO AND CARLSBAD. WE WOULD HAVE NEEDED ONE ENGINE PER HOME TO SAVE THEM ALL," reported **Carlsbad Battalion Chief Tom Dana**, concluding even that arsenal of power might not have been enough. He noted that by the time the eventual full force of 700 firefighters was on the scene that evening,

some from as far away as central and northern California, Carlsbad's 54 homes were already lost.

"Every guy was out there trying," explained Dana, a 20-year man. "Firefighters were up on steep, slippery roofs trying to protect every house they could. The police did a great job evacuating people in the midst of everything."

Deployed on Esfera Street with three homes already on fire, Dana and his crew were able to save most of the homes on their part of the street while the fire triumphed to the west and through Box Canyon.

"It happened very quickly. The fire was unpredictable. There were no major injuries. In that we were successful."

"IT WAS FRUSTRATING AND SAD. I GOT SICK OF HAVING TO TELL PEOPLE THEIR HOUSE HAD BURNED DOWN," recounted **Oceanside Fire Department Administrative Officer Peter Lawrence**, in a voice still tinged with regret months after the event.

"We lost 30 out of 40 homes on Fosca. Late that night, as residents returned, eight homeowners asked me anxiously about their homes. I had to tell six of them their homes were gone."

During the Carlsbad conflagration, Lawrence put into practice a valuable lesson he had learned in fighting the 1993 Laguna Beach fire. "If we couldn't save a house, we would rush into the burning structure and quickly grab items of value."

The five-minute treasure hunt told as much about the firefighters as it did about the property owners. "Things of value vary by age," observed Lawrence. The 20-year-olds seized the stereo and CDs; 30-year-olds went for family items such as stuffed animals and photos; 40-year-olds took mementos. Lawrence himself carted out computers.

"It was a weird feeling to know you were the

last person ever to be in someone's house," said Lawrence, relating how they put the items out on the lawn and safeguarded them with plastic.

"We saved a small china cabinet from one older couple's house." When the owners returned, they were ecstatic to find some of their possessions still there. If we couldn't save the house, it was good to know we could give them something."

"A FIRE LIKE THIS REALLY TESTS WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TAUGHT, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU'RE IN A COMMAND POSITION," stated **Carlsbad Fire Department Acting Battalion Chief Kevin Crawford**, who served as Carlsbad's Incident Commander early in the event.

"It's hard for people who weren't there to picture the scope of the event. Dry fuel. Dry air. And hot winds driving the fire made for explosive conditions," he explained, stressing that the help received from neighboring departments was critical.

"Guys from all the agencies put themselves on the line for us; they busted their tail for Carlsbad, some of them for 24 hours without a break."

Nevertheless, they were overmatched and overwhelmed by the blaze. "With limited resources and houses going off so quickly, there was no time for well-coordinated strategy or tactics. We just threw everything we had at it. From our perspective, the whole world was on fire."

"THE SMOKE WAS SO HEAVY IT WAS HARD TO TELL IF IT WAS DAY OR NIGHT," explained **Carlsbad Fire Department Division Chief Brian Watson**, who had served the city for 17 years. "I know that sometime between 10:00 pm and 2:00 am I went into the EOC to apprise Operations of the situation, and then attended an Incident Command planning meeting."

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trash can came at us from across the street as we left about 6:30 on Monday," she recalled with some indignation at the memory, "but there had been no notice, no sirens, no equipment or firefighters on our block. Now, there were hoses everywhere and a fire truck by every house." Except that many of the houses were no longer there.

Irony compounded the Blehas' grief and shock. While packing up in haste the evening before, Pat Bleha had been careful to take off her shoes, so as not to soil her beautiful white carpet. Bill Bleha had parked his treasured new Corvette in the garage where it would not be damaged by smoke or embers. In the hurried evacuation, he and Pat drove off together in her car. Within hours, the car and carpet were gone, along with their house and almost everything in it. Still perched on the curb was their daughter's old clunker, which they had planned on selling.

After evacuating their wood house with a wood-shingled roof and wooden fence surrounding it, Don and Jan Stapp returned to their El Fuerte Street home expecting to see it gone. It was still there. Later, they discovered a hole in their roof, and learned the house had caught fire but been saved by an unknown man who drove by around 9:00 pm, saw their roof on fire, grabbed a hose and put it out.

Another Carlsbad couple also found their home intact, but they knew whom to thank. Diana and George Devereaux, owners of the only surviving house on a Fosca Street cul-de-sac, discovered a note in the kitchen of their tile-roofed home. It read: "We were here. Your roof & us saved your home. E-1113 Fallbrook Fire." The couple called the North County Fire Protection District to learn the firefighters' names so they could thank them personally. One had even answered the phone while saving their house, telling the inquiring caller, "They're not here, but tell them their house is safe."

Six years before the fire, George Devereaux had replaced his wood roof with tile. Of the six burned houses on one side of his house and three on the other side, all had wood roofs. Confessing that he had originally been recalcitrant about re-doing his roof, Devereaux surveyed the pieces of wood from his neighbors' roofs cluttered around his back yard and advised other reluctant homeowners, "Forget buying a new car and buy a safe roof. It's the first line of defense in Southern California."

Tuesday And Beyond

A war zone. Armageddon. A lava flow. The wind raging through like a freight train. These were some of the words residents used to describe the fire-ravaged nightmare of horror that would remain seared in their memories forever.

Coming home the next morning generated equally memorable images. Sorting through the rubble that once was their home, residents told of feeling like archaeologists on a dig.

The fire had conquered even the post office. Mail deliveries to 4,000 addresses in Carlsbad and surrounding areas were not made on Tuesday. Some power outages on Monday night lingered into the next day, and gas service was shut off to 60 homes.

A fatigued City Council convened for its second emergency meeting at 9:00 am, mulling status reports by an even more exhausted staff. No looting had occurred, said Police Chief Robert Vales, communicating one of the few happy facts of the day. Maps showing the burned areas were presented to the five members, all of whom had visited or soon would visit the heartbreaking sites themselves.

6:37 PM Police officers are going door to door to evacuate more people on Sitio Baya and Terraza Disoma.

6:38 PM A fire crew is dispatched to Cadencia Street.

6:40 PM A battalion arrives at Cadencia Street with five engines.

6:40 PM Structure protection begins on Esfera Street.

6:40 PM Fire is reported heading toward Questhaven Road.

6:42 PM Several homes on Cadencia Street are reported on fire. Personnel on the scene request engines and overhead staff.

6:42 PM Police officers evacuate Cadencia Street residents.

6:46 PM A residential fire alarm goes off at 7313 Borla Place.

6:46 PM Police on the scene at Cadencia Street/La Costa Avenue request a traffic control unit.

6:47 PM A shake roof at the end of Carpa Court has ignited.

6:47 PM Several structures are reported on fire at Perdiz Street/Fosca Way.

6:47 PM Police officers report they are

continued from page 24

The team concept worked well, believed Watson, but ultimately the biggest help was what had been the biggest hindrance: the wind.

"If the winds had not died down, we knew the fire could burn all the way to the coast."

"WE HAD SENT CREWS OUT TO CONDUCT A CONFINED SPACE DRILL IN THE PALOMAR BUSINESS PARK WHEN I NOTICED A SMALL HEADER OF SMOKE AT ABOUT 1:30 IN THE AFTERNOON," remembered Carlsbad Fire Department Battalion Chief Sonny Hilliard. "We discontinued the drill."

Appointed as Carlsbad representative to the Unified Incident Command, Hilliard saw residents evacuating their homes as he drove down Questhaven Road toward Elfin Forest Road a little before 4:30 pm. "I was unable to proceed," he said, explaining why: "There was a wall of flame one mile wide on each side of Elfin Forest Road."

While waiting for the fire to blow over them, he and Captain Chris Heiser linked up with two CDF engines, one Fallbrook and one Escondido engine, all also unable to get to their appointed destinations. A fiery hell broke loose.

"Over the next 20 minutes, the fire blew up around us and made a high-speed run to the west. We engaged in protective action at a chlorine treatment building and then escaped to the west as fire overran the Questhaven/Elfin Forest intersection."

A scant hour and one-half later, Hilliard would be winding his way back to Carlsbad when again, "we saw flames 30 feet high on both sides of the road." During the confrontation, "we twice had to drive through sections of Questhaven that were completely overrun with fire. Arriving at Rancho Santa Fe Road, we were again forced to drive through a section of road that was overrun."

Arriving finally in Carlsbad, he heard that homes were already burning on that street as well as on Esfera near Bajo Court and on Fosca. "I was assigned as group supervisor at Esfera and Cadencia, but my unit couldn't come up through Cadencia because it was too hot. We sent them down the road and I coordinated engine and personnel traffic until midnight. All we could do was to make a stand where we could, protect where it was feasible and hope weather conditions would abate. We worked to restrict losses to structures already on fire. In this, we were primarily successful."

Pointing out that he met up with firefighters who were going "from fire to fire to fire" within the county and throughout the region, Hilliard emphasized, "You can't get in front of a wildfire of this magnitude. You can't stop it, even if you have all the resources in the world."

"BEFORE THE WIND SHIFTED, WE WERE ANTICIPATING AN ADVANCE INTO RANCHO SANTA FE," reported CDF's Charles Maner, a 25-year veteran who served as Unified Incident Commander for the crisis. "Once the fire got into Box Canyon with the homes so close together and most of them with wood shake roofs, I honestly don't believe more engines would have saved any more homes."

Maintaining that most ordinances permitting Class A roofs do not go far enough and that they should specifically prohibit all except non-combustible roofs, Maner recounted a disturbing scene.

"About two months after the fire, I was driving through the Cadencia area. Some guy was building a wooden room addition, putting wood shake shingles on the roof."

Shaking his head in disbelief, Maner said, "I couldn't believe it. Another wood roof."

Property owners were returning to their homes, if they were lucky; to the rubble that less than 24 hours ago had been their home, if they were not. Over the next few days, Home Depot without fanfare would drive up and down the La Costa streets distributing free shovels, rakes, trash cans and work gloves, but for now many residents sifted through the ashes with their bare hands. A Corningware pot turned upside-down; a rescued doll clutched by a child; a few bits of crockery sticking up out of the debris; this was all that remained of many homes.

"Only a few twigs were left and those were charred black. It was like a lunar scape in my neighborhood," recounted Carlsbad's Bobbie Hoder, who after her overnight stint at the EOC returned home to find her house still standing but many of her neighbors' homes gone.

"I saw people on El Fuerte slowly collecting treasures ... lining up a vase, a glass ... it was all they had left. One elderly lady had just lost her husband to death a few months before. Now she had lost her house, too."

Each homesite told its own story. In one driveway, a vehicle's windshield had melted. Nearby, in what used to be a garage, an entire car collection was gone. In the kitchen of a home that had miraculously escaped the fire, the family's turkey dinner awaited them in the oven.

For bereft homeowners, emotions ran the gamut. "Honey, do you want to save this?" Karl Palmer asked his wife, holding up a decorative antique iron that was one of the only items in their house to survive. Lou Stark, whose family had lost its 3,000-square-foot home to the blaze, pointed to some singed branches, commenting, "Well, we wanted to get this tree trimmed."

Many took a philosophical view. Although his 4,200-square-foot El Fuerte home had been described as a show place before it succumbed to the fire, 72-year-old Harry Mooradian declared, "Your life is more important than a house. You can always build it up."

In remnants of the past, some searching through the debris found hope for the future. Among the several cherished artifacts displayed by Gerry and Marilyn Greber in their burned-down Fosca Street home, only one piece survived. It had weathered many a political and natural storm. The item: a 4,000-year-old Israeli oil lamp.

Every Home Told A Tale All Its Own

A poignant report in the October 23 *San Diego Union-Tribune* chronicled the coming home of residents. No two stories were alike. Some were particularly heart-wrenching.

In one account, "Ward Copley, 71, sat in his driveway in a borrowed plastic lawn chair, dabbing his eyes with a tissue and surveying the remains of his home. 'What I own now, you're looking at it,' Copley said, pointing to his sooty shoes and clothing. 'Even this coat, it's not mine. It's just borrowed to keep out the morning chill. It's just one thing after another,' he said with tears in his eyes. 'My wife died a year and a half ago, and I had a dog that died. And now this.'"

Residents whose homes survived felt almost as bad as those who'd lost their homes. Doris and Don Veale, who had put a new roof on their home three months before the fire, shared orange juice and sympathy with their neighbors, inviting them in to use the bathroom and phone.

In some ways, the sight was as bizarre as the previous night's flames. Local, national and even international media descended on distraught residents covered in soot while pin-striped insurance adjusters roamed the rubble, forms in hand.

trying to remove a reluctant resident at 3334 Cadencia Street.

6:48 PM A shake roof at 3200 Fosca Street is reported to have ignited.

6:49 PM Fire is reported on Piragua Street.

6:50 PM The EOC is fully functional with all sections — Command/Management, Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance — up and running.

6:50 PM Structure protection begins on the east side of Borla Place.

6:51 PM More fires are reported on Fosca Way, Perdiz Street, Cadencia Street and in Box Canyon.

6:52 PM Fire is reported on an easement near a house at 3300 Venado Street.

6:52 PM SDG&E is called to respond to an electrical explosion that occurs in the 3100 block of Cadencia Street.

6:53 PM Flames are reported between the houses on Obelisco Court.

6:54 PM Fire personnel are assigned to participate with police staff in a medic unit.

FATEFUL ATTRACTION

"Carlsbad has steep canyon terrain, and is subject to hot, dry, high speed Santa Ana winds ... in excess of the testing limits for treated wood roofs."

—from Carlsbad Agenda Bill No. 14,092
amending Ordinance No. NS-398 Amending
Title 18, Section 18.04.230 Prohibiting Wood
Shakes and Shingles as a Roof Covering

7224 Babilonia Street.

3330 Bajo Court. 3332 Bajo Court. 3344 Bajo
Court.

3205, 3207, 3209, 3211 and 3213 Cadencia
Street. 3201, 3203, 3204, 3205, 3206, 3207,
3208, 3209, 3211, 3212, 3215, 3216, 3217,
3219, 3220, 3223 and 3225 Fosca Street.

The addresses read like a roll call of wartime fatalities. Fortunately not flesh and blood, these fatalities were walls, floors and all the replaceable and irreplaceable elements that comprise a house, and make that house a home.

Walls, floors, cupboards, closets, windows, doors ... and roofs. Especially roofs. Of the 54 Carlsbad homes completely destroyed in the fire, only four had tile roofs. Two had composition shingle roofs. Forty-eight had wood shake roofs, accounting for 88 percent of the destroyed homes. The figure may be higher, because the two unknown roofs most likely were shake as well.

Numbers told the story, as did a tour of burned-out neighborhoods after the fire. On one street, the tile-roofed homes on an entire block remained, some singed but all triumphantly standing, while the lone shake-roofed structure was a sad pile of rubble.

Nine million dollars, four dozen homes, horrendous devastation and emotional trauma might have been saved if these roofs had not been made of wood. The implications are more

severe: wood roofs enabled the fire to continue on its destructive path, damaging structures (and the lives of people within them) that might otherwise have escaped unscathed. As one firefighter wryly remarked, having a wood shake roof is like covering your home with kindling.

Before the fire, Carlsbad had taken steps to minimize the danger of wood roofing. The building code in place required a minimum Class B roof covering for all new roofs and re-roofed structures, allowing "treated" wood shake or shingle roofs pressure-impregnated with fire retardant products.

Los Angeles had already banned the latter after tests indicated the impregnation process often cracked the wood prior to installation, exposing the shingle's untreated interior. Farther up the coast, Santa Barbara's fire marshal testified after a fire in his city that "Class B pressure-impregnated roofs will still burn and potentially contribute to the spread of fire."

With images of the October 1996 fire burned into each member's memory, on March 18, 1997 the Carlsbad City Council passed an aggressive ordinance designed to lessen the chance of the widespread destruction that had swept through the southeast quadrant the previous fall. Not surprisingly, only two people spoke out against adoption of the ordinance; also not surprisingly, both represented the wood roofing industry.

At the time of adoption, wood shake roofing fell in the middle of the price range of available materials and offered less than half the longevity of clay or concrete tiles, or of "fake shake." In fact, treated wood shake was by far the most expensive material when regarded on a life cycle/cost-per-year basis.

As the city and citizens learned on October 21, 1996, the cost in so many other ways was too high ever to bear again.

Some people came to help — one woman and her daughter handed out long-stemmed pink roses to people who had lost their homes. Some came merely to gawk — cars and people paraded through the areas taking snapshots and video footage. By noon on Tuesday, the crush of traffic forced Carlsbad police to stop unauthorized vehicles from driving into the area, to ease congestion.

After checking on their homes, several residents went in search of their pets. Horses, goats, cats, dogs, rabbits and birds throughout the Harmony Grove fire area ended up safely ensconced at the North County Animal Shelter in Carlsbad and other rescue venues. Most animals were picked up by their owners on Tuesday, but some went home on their own. The Carlsbad shelter released a set of homing pigeons that promptly flew back to the agriculture department at San Marcos High.

Picking Up The Pieces

On this day and days to follow, Red Cross disaster relief canteen trucks drove through impacted neighborhoods, providing meals to hungry, displaced residents and impromptu mental health counseling. In addition to staffing the shelter during the night of the fire and the Resource Center at Mission Estancia Elementary School for the duration of the week, Red Cross crews identified 226 residences that were destroyed or sustained damage. Overall, 135 local Red Cross workers contributed to the disaster relief effort and more than 550 meals were served to victims and emergency workers.

Red Cross volunteers are Jacks and Jills of all trades, with a sense of compassion high on the list of required skills. "People get sort of shell-shocked and they don't know what to do," explained Bonnie McCassy, a Red Cross volunteer from Del Mar who worked at the Mission Estancia center. She said that homeowners who suddenly find themselves homeless are often overwhelmed by the reality and sometimes reluctant to seek help. Even people who quickly contact their insurance company are challenged by the immediate needs of food, shelter and clothing.

To assist them, the Red Cross coordinated the donation of temporary space in apartments and condominiums and distributed cash vouchers for use at stores of the victims' choosing.

"We try to treat people with a lot of dignity," McCassy affirmed. "We don't ever give them used clothes. We try to let them pick a store they like and buy the things they need. Our whole goal is to get people back up and running in their regular life."

While the Red Cross was busy at the site, back at the Carlsbad Community Development office on Las Palmas, Principal Building Inspector Pat Kelley briefed colleagues on the fire, updating its impact on residents and the city's response.

"Everybody in the office wanted to help ... pull files ... put together reports ... anything they could do ... they just wanted to help," he recalled. They would have many opportunities to do just that in the long days ahead.

- 6:54 PM** Many homes on Cadencia/Esfera Streets are reported threatened.
- 6:54 PM** A crew is at the Cadencia/Esfera scene.
- 6:55 PM** A strike team is assigned to the Fosca area.
- 6:55 PM** With its first site at Aviara Oaks school, the Red Cross is considering establishing a second shelter at Carlsbad High.
- 6:56 PM** Two dogs are reported in a house at 3550 Sitio Baya, along with an elderly male suffering from a hearing problem.
- 6:57 PM** Police report that residents at Carpa Court refuse to leave their roofs.
- 6:58 PM** CHP concerns about the chlorine tanks at Leucadia County Water District, 1960 La Costa Avenue, are being addressed.
- 6:58 PM** Police officers set up traffic control at Cadencia Street/Rancho Santa Fe Road.
- 7:00 PM** City Council members begin arriving at the EOC center to observe activities.

STATISTICS OF THE HARMONY GROVE FIRE

Fire first reported	October 21, 1996 1:52 pm in Harmony Grove; 5:06 pm in Carlsbad
Cause	Undetermined
Origin	Suspicious

CDF said the fire most likely was caused by one of the following:

- Arson
- Hot metal from a catalytic converter ejected through the tailpipe of a passing vehicle
- A cigarette butt carelessly tossed by a passing driver

Total acres burned	8,600
Residences destroyed	122
Mobile homes destroyed	2
Businesses destroyed	2
Damaged homes	142
Estimated total damage	\$51.8 million
Estimated public assistance costs (includes firefighting and other public services)	\$991,800
Full containment	October 23, 1996; 6:00 pm
Full control	October 24, 1996; 6:00 pm

Some Carlsbad Specifics

Homes totally destroyed	54
Value of destroyed homes	\$11.8 million
City costs incurred	\$518,091 before FEMA/OES reimbursement \$201,583 after FEMA/OES reimbursement
Involved firefighters	700+
Deaths	None
Injuries	Six: Two civilians; Four firefighters
Sandbags used after the fire to fight erosion	70,000
Number of burned trees on city-owned streets	110

SEARING IMAGES

A Day In The Life Of A Fire



After starting from an undetermined cause near 9237 Harmony Grove Road at 1:52 pm on Monday, October 21, 1996, what became known as the Harmony Grove fire raged through that unincorporated area of North San Diego County, then flew with a wind-driven vengeance into Southeast Carlsbad, lighting up the sky as night fell.



© SKYDOG PHOTO 1996



© FRITZ LIGHT 1997



The spectacle was surreal, pitting man against flame. But behind the scenes, Carlsbad's Emergency Operating Center provided vital support, with dozens of employees efficiently attending to a myriad of duties while City Council members kept a watchful eye.



© BILL RICHMOND 1996



Fifty-four totally destroyed homes later, Carlsbad citizens looked back in awe and anguish, then resolutely faced forward and began rebuilding their lives and their community, struck by the awareness that the past twenty-four hours would always be remembered as much more than one mere day.

A Quick Response From The Governor

As the former mayor of San Diego, California Governor Pete Wilson was familiar with the high-risk terrain of North County, but he never dreamed he'd be visiting Carlsbad on a mission such as the one he undertook on the morning of Tuesday, October 22.

As he set the wheels in motion to secure state and ultimately federal assistance for Carlsbad fire victims, among others, Wilson signed the State of Emergency declaration on a set of wheels belonging to the city's Chevy Suburban at the corner of Cadencia and Perdiz streets. He had previously conducted an aerial survey of the area, followed by a walking (and talking) tour in which he was accompanied by Carlsbad City Council and staff, not to mention a horde of media representatives.

After speaking with fire victims and viewing the damage up close, an emotional Wilson broke down. "It's a rich language, but there are no words that can capture the heartbreak that these people are feeling or the sympathy I have for them."

His proclamation authorized state reimbursement of local firefighting costs, made mutual aid mandatory from other local and state agencies and cleared emergency purchases. It also represented one more rung up on the ladder to national assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in Washington, D.C.

Pursuant to Carlsbad's proclamation at 6:25 the previous evening as well as to proclamations issued by Encinitas and San Marcos, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors had ratified a county State of Emergency early Tuesday morning. Now it would be up to FEMA to declare either a State of Disaster or a (lesser status) State of Emergency that would enable the cities and the county to qualify for special federal assistance.

The city would share its three primary concerns with FEMA: assistance for fire victims; soil stabilization of the area to reduce the potential for erosion, flooding and degradation of Batiquitos Lagoon; and recovery of municipal costs associated with emergency response to the fire.

On October 23, FEMA would declare a State of Emergency instead of the hoped-for State of Disaster, which would have reimbursed at the highest level expenses incurred by the city and its citizens as a result of the fire. Although FEMA Director James Witt inspected the fire area along with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services' David Fukutomi on October 28, FEMA would later refuse to upgrade the emergency to a disaster.

Later That Day

After a third status update meeting at 3:00 pm, the City Council convened again at 6:00 pm for its "routine" Tuesday meeting. The session was far from routine. Just over 24 hours after the event had begun, staff members made comprehensive reports on fire, police, shelter and damage assessment efforts.

Television can be strikingly insightful. The drained, exhausted countenances of the five council members and body language of officials reporting to them clearly expressed the drama of the disaster. It was obvious that although the worst fire in Carlsbad's history soon would be officially over, for many the embers of pain would linger for a lifetime.

- 7:06 PM SDG&E checks on reported explosives in the Cadencia area.
- 7:07 PM Homes are being evacuated at the south end of Melrose Drive and at the Olivenhain Municipal Water District, 1966 Olivenhain Road in Encinitas.
- 7:09 PM A couple dozen homes are reported on fire in the Box Canyon area.
- 7:09 PM Gas explosions are reported in the Esfera/Cadencia area.
- 7:10 PM Crews are reassigned from Rancho Santa Fe Road/Meadowlark Lane to El Fuerte Street for structure extinguishment.
- 7:11 PM A police report advises: "All units need to move west of Esfera. We are losing this area."
- 7:12 PM Several dozen homes are now reported on fire in the Box Canyon area.
- 7:12 PM Traffic control is established at La Costa Avenue/Esfera Street.
- 7:14 PM San Dieguito Academy and Carlsbad High School are

RINGS OF SORROW, RINGS OF SOLACE ...
THE DRAMA HAD A HUMAN VOICE

History is a human story. It is his story, her story, and ultimately all our stories that give events their fullness and meaning.

Assistant City Manager Frank Mannen and his colleagues at City Hall heard many accounts of the fire from people whose voices reverberated with frustration, fear, anger, sorrow, anxiety and a host of other emotions, but Frank said, "None was as compelling as the man who called because he felt a need to explain what had happened to him."

Months after the conversation, Mannen remembered it well. "The man wanted to tell someone what happened. He needed to make it clear that he had done everything right. Everything possible to ward off a fire. He had stuccoed his house. Even stuccoed the eaves. Installed a tile roof. Landscaped with fire-resistant plantings. Cleared the surrounding vegetation to create a buffer between his property and Box Canyon. The only combustible portion of his home was his garage door."

The man sadly told Mannen how the shake roof of a home across the street ignited on that malevolent Monday. In a flash, embers flew on the wind like a witch on a broomstick, setting fire to the man's garage door and blazing into his house, totally destroying his entire home.

"Hearing his story brought tears to my eyes," said Frank. "He wasn't angry at City Hall. He wasn't mad at anybody. He simply had to tell someone what happened."

A Little Less Than Kin, But More Than Kind

Praising the Red Cross as "an excellent resource staffed with volunteers who understand the psychology of disaster," Mannen said that employees in the City Manager's Office functioned in that capacity as well, fielding hundreds of calls for several days after the event. People who were directly involved called to talk about their loss. Many residents who didn't lose their homes were nevertheless filled with panic and a sense of foreboding. Others — by far the largest contingent — were eager to become involved by helping.

The latter, compassionate group provided many heartwarming conversations, explained Administrative Assistants Marianne Arcidiacono and Nancy Miller. "The generosity of individuals and businesses was incredible. We were overwhelmed," they said.

"Over and over again, callers begged us to allow them to help, asking, 'What can we do?' At times, we had more volunteers than we could use."

"It made me feel good to work in this city," concluded Arcidiacono. "And it made me feel fortunate to live here, too."

Closure At Last

Although FEMA closed its Declaration of Emergency on October 31, 1996, the City of Carlsbad declared a continuing State of Emergency until June 3, 1997. Keeping the October 1996 Resolution No. 96-373 open gave the city the power to conduct recovery and mitigation efforts on private property.

As set out in the agenda bill, "State law requires that the Council review the status of the local emergency at least every 21 days and extend it until it is terminated and there is no longer a need for emergency powers and that the situation has resulted in conditions which are now deemed to be within the control of the normal protective services, personnel, equipment and facilities of the city."

By June 1997, erosion control efforts were complete, and OES had reported that the state's request to FEMA to upgrade the federal emergency declaration to a major disaster had been denied.

Estimating that the city's expenses for the fire "will approach \$360,500" and that "the city may expect to recover \$250,000 of those expenses," the five council members unanimously voted to adopt Resolution No. 97-465 closing the Declaration.

reportedly being set up as shelters for the Red Cross.

7:14 PM Police officers are evacuating a woman from a house on fire at 7305 Borla Place and escorting her to get her children.

7:16 PM A resident at 7753 Caminito Encanto reports sparks around the home and requests evacuation assistance.

7:16 PM A fire alarm goes off at 3207 Fosca Street.

7:19 PM Citizens in the Vallecitos Water District building, 2310 Rancho Santa Fe Road, request evacuation assistance.

7:21 PM Traffic control for evacuation assistance is requested in the fire areas because "streets are getting backed up from looky-loos."

7:21 PM The house at 7305 Borla Place is declared "a total."

7:23 PM Fire is reported at Corintia and El Fuerte Streets.

7:23 PM Fire is reported at Alga Hills facing south, midway up the hill.

NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR

Out of the scorched earth sprang a grass-roots organization formed to assist the needs of the fire's "survivors." It came to be known as Neighbor To Neighbor (N2N), a moniker that described both its inception and operation.

Nine-year La Costa resident Kay Pickard was instrumental in N2N's foundation. "Having sheltered my friends who were forced to evacuate their apartment during the evening of the fire, and learning afterward of friends from church who had lost their homes, it quickly became evident that the situation was major and that direct, hands-on help was needed on the spot," Pickard explained.

"I made a list of ten people I knew who had performed volunteer work in schools and other organizations. Within a week, N2N was up and running. Our objective was to serve as a resource both to those in need and those desiring to provide goods and/or services."

As a community action group, N2N was very active indeed, initially assigning individual members to liaison with city officials, the Red Cross and other organizations.

Each family was assigned a coordinator family in the community to evaluate and help fulfill short- and long-term needs.

In response to rumors that some donations of money and materials were taking a long and winding road to recipients, N2N worked to ensure that needed products and services were supplied swiftly and directly to the end user. The group opened a storefront at La Costa Avenue and El Camino Real where people could bring donations for fire victims to select as needed. Goods and services that would be required in the long-term were "banked" for the future.

To provide a conduit of information about damage assessment, insurance, recovery and rebuilding efforts that would reach each person affected by the fire, N2N organized "town meetings" that drew together providers and recipients. Representatives from the city, Red Cross, FEMA and other agencies presented technical information, answered questions and met with individual victims.

N2N was an all-volunteer organization, whose stated reason for existing was not to replace or duplicate assistance

agencies already in place, "but rather to act as a central location to coordinate the services already available, identify continuing needs not currently being addressed and provide a network opportunity for the members of the community to assist each other collectively and one-on-one."

In December 1996, Neighbor to Neighbor became an extension of Community Assisting Recovery (CARE), a non-profit charitable organization headquartered in Northridge. In addition to providing a legal framework under which N2N could operate, CARE offered expert advice to Carlsbad residents on the insurance recovery process and other matters affecting victims.

During the previous month, Denso International America, Inc. a wireless communications company with facilities in Carlsbad, had donated \$10,000 to the city for use in assisting fire victims. The money was forwarded to CARE, to enable Neighbor to Neighbor to maintain a community-based organization able to assist residents faced with the process of recovery from disastrous events through education, support and financial assistance.

AFTER THE STORM

"Warm food and loving hearts will be there for you."

—LA COSTA HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INVITATION ASKING COMMUNITY
RESIDENTS IN THE FIRE AREA TO SHARE LUNCH ON OCTOBER 23

In times of tragedy people come together: person to person, neighbor to neighbor and city to city. Less than 24 hours after the fire entered Carlsbad, a Resource Center was opened at Mission Estancia elementary school in the heart of the smoldering southeast quadrant of the city. Operated by the Red Cross with the assistance of Carlsbad Community Service/Recreation staff, the Resource Center was established to meet a number of critical needs for fire victims. These included a needs-based voucher system enabling people to purchase food, clothing, shoes and medical products; temporary hotel accommodations and rental assistance; crisis intervention through the county mental health department; and occupational business supplies.

The center opened at 4:00 pm on Tuesday, October 22. By 7:00 pm, six families, with 15 children in tow, were receiving assistance.

Before the center opened, Community Services employees had brainstormed ways to help the Red Cross assist fire victims. Facilitating access to city services and information, providing transportation assistance and helping set up an insurance claims center were among the ideas put into action.

Then Senior Management Analyst Keith Beverly suggested, "Why not do what we do best? Provide recreation services to kids."

So they did. During the Center's six days of operation, Recreation staff served over 20 youngsters whose parents were occupied submitting disaster relief paperwork to the Red Cross or returning to their homes to evaluate the damage. Food and fun highlighted the menu of activities. Employees provided games, sports, arts and crafts as well as refreshments and meals. Target Stores donated \$300 for the purchase of toys and other fun stuff to entertain the kids.

Four sisters from one now-homeless family spent two full days at the center. While the parents jumped through the necessary hoops to begin putting their lives back together, one of the girls seized a hula hoop and practiced her technique for the entire two days, to the delight and encouragement of the staff. At the outset, her personal best was 10 revolutions. By the time she left, her record stood at an unbeatable 453 revolutions!

Recreation Supervisor Marc Beasley was so touched by the girls and their situation that he personally purchased four Halloween costumes and invited the family to attend, free of charge, the department's Halloween Mansion on October 26. After being scared by the reality of fire, the girls enjoyed being scared just for fun.

Like a hula hoop, what goes around comes around. The fundraiser generated \$535, which was given to the Red Cross to assist victims of a future disaster.

- 7:25 PM A crew is assigned to structure protection on Esfera Street.
- 7:25 PM A general alarm goes off at a residence on El Fuerte Street.
- 7:25 PM An elderly person is evacuated at 5505 Vivienda.
- 7:27 PM Houses are reported threatened on the 3500 block of El Fuerte Street.
- 7:27 PM A balcony is on fire at 7700 Caminito Sierra.
- 7:30 PM San Marcos opens a second shelter, at Rancho Santa Fe Middle School. A third shelter, at San Dieguito Academy, will be opened soon after.
- 7:30 PM Fire is reported on Bolero Street.
- 7:30 PM Fire is reported on the back bank of a house at 7327 Bolero Street.
- 7:31 PM Fire is reported on an empty lot next to a house at 7339 Bolero Street.
- 7:32 PM Police report that the traffic at La Costa Avenue and El Camino Real is "really backed up."
- 7:33 PM Houses on Piragua Street are reportedly being lost.

RESOURCEFUL SOLUTIONS ...

A COMMUNITY THAT CARED DREW TOGETHER IN SUPPORT

Within hours and days of the event, organizations and individuals from near and far jumped into recovery efforts as rapidly as the fire had jumped Rancho Santa Fe Road. Here are a few of the many instances of generosity.

And little children shall lead them

Far from the fire zone in miles but not in spirit, the young students at Magnolia Elementary in the northwest quadrant of the city came to school on the morning of October 22 frightened and empathetic.

"We have to do something. What if it were us?" they bluntly inquired of teachers and parents. In response, the PTA unanimously agreed to donate 50% of the proceeds from the upcoming school garage sale to the Red Cross, earmarked specifically for the fire victims.

Also in Carlsbad, Hope Elementary School donated a portion of proceeds from its Autumn Festival toward the victims. La Costa Meadows Elementary School, some of whose students had lost their homes, donated all the money raised at its Halloween Carnival to help survivors put their lives back together. In the same neighborhood, students from La Costa Canyon High put on a benefit performance to help victims, again including some of their own.

In the business of helping

Within a day of the fire, the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce was pursuing a two-fold mission: facilitating the donation of goods and services to help fire victims, and assisting chamber businesses that were themselves affected by the fire.

Offers began pouring in right away. Among them, a pet hospital offered free kennel service.

A phone company gave away long distance phone cards. Several Carlsbad businesses provided free office space and access to phones, faxes and copiers. Three area mailing companies offered free mail receiving services for victims who no longer had a mailbox, or indeed, a home.

Apartment locating services provided free referrals for temporary housing, while some architects and contractors reduced their rates for rebuilding. A San Diego electric firm supplied free labor and coordinated the donation of materials for the installation of temporary services and security lights. Restaurants gave away gift certificates. One animal lover brought in a dozen cans of top-of-the-line dogfood.

Last but not certainly not least to the frazzled victims who felt as if the smell of smoke and aura of embers would be with them forevermore, a local beauty salon donated complimentary shampoos, haircuts and blow-dries.

Making the cross a little easier to bear

Looking for help is the last thing victims often have time or energy to do, but thanks to the American Red Cross, in times of crisis help finds them.

Seeking out residents on November 14, the agency wrote to each of them, "Even though the wildfire has been long since put out, the American Red Cross realizes that the healing process for you and your family is only just beginning."

As noted in the letter, the "overwhelming display of support from neighbors and local merchants" was designed to help people meet the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Gift certificates for a wide array of goods and

services were included with each letter, and a flyer detailing other vendor-contributed items was attached for families to avail themselves of on a first-come, first-served basis. Featuring everything from Soup Plantation soup to Harvest Ranch Market nuts, the list also included shoes, pizza, cosmetics, grocery store and department store gift certificates and complimentary stays at a local hotel.

Helping the Red Cross help fire victims were companies such as the *North County Times*. The newspaper requested donations earmarked for the Red Cross and also offered a week of free classified ads for "anyone who was affected by the recent North County fires or who would like to help. This includes locating family, friends, pets, etc., or offering any kind of volunteer assistance."

Churches of all denominations pitched in, too. Some collected donations of goods and invited fire families to pick and choose as needed. Others held garage sales, with cash proceeds going directly to the victims. One church in Denver, Colorado even sent \$5,000 to the Red Cross to help Harmony Grove fire victims get on with their lives.

Among the performers at the November 1996 Kids for Kids Musical Evening at the St. Elizabeth Seaton Catholic Church in La Costa was Yoshi Shen, a young musician who had lost her home. The event honored firefighters and the community. The North Coast Repertory Theatre collected donations for the Red Cross to benefit Harmony Grove victims.

Giving a run for their money

Support came from unexpected sources, including Boston-based State Street Research Funds, a mutual funds management company that sponsored the annual Carlsbad 5000 foot race. After watching national reports of the fire cutting

a swath through Carlsbad, State Street officials decided to donate \$2,000 to the Carlsbad Fire Department. The funds were used to improve the department's capabilities of dealing with urban interface firefighting.

Closer to home, Bekins Moving and Storage Company offered free 30-day storage to people who had lost their home. Pacific Bell offered free installation and a month of message center service to people without telephone service due to the fire. SDG&E said utility bills for the month would be waived for those whose homes burned down.

- 7:34 PM A resident at 7352 Bolero Street calls in to report fire in her back yard.
- 7:34 PM Five homes are going up in flames near Cadencia Street. The situation is reported to be "desperate."
- 7:37 PM A general alarm goes off at a convalescent home.
- 7:39 PM Condos on Piragua Street west of Cadencia Street are reported to be going up.
- 7:41 PM Fire is reported at 2930 Managua Place.
- 7:41 PM Fire is reported at 3210 Piragua Street.
- 7:41 PM Fire is reported at 7352 El Fuerte Street.
- 7:41 PM Fire is reported at 7312 Muslo Lane.
- 7:42 PM Fire is reported on a hill on Piragua Street.
- 7:43 PM The main body of fire, now 5-1/2 hours old, crosses Box Canyon to El Fuerte Street.
- 7:48 PM The CHP reports that the fire has jumped El Fuerte and is turning toward an elementary school on the west side.



THE CALIFORNIA CONNECTION ... CITIES SHARED EXPERIENCES AND EXPERTISE TO HELP PEOPLE REGAIN THEIR LIVES

Although the federal government elected to classify the Harmony Grove/Carlsbad fire as an emergency rather than a disaster, October 21 was a true disaster to those impacted by it. Since this was the worst natural calamity to befall the city in its history, staff members were not familiar with the potential pitfalls and challenges looming on the horizon.

Despite having prepared for contingencies, they were now faced with a crash course in recovery and rehabilitation. A neighbor to the north rode in to the rescue.

The day after the fire, Laguna Beach officials called Carlsbad officials and offered to help guide them through the maze of intricacies. After the fire that devastated Laguna Beach in 1993, destroying 300 homes, officials from Oakland had extended a helping hand. Now, Carlsbad was about to receive the benefit of Laguna Beach's experience.

On October 24, representatives from Laguna Beach's community development, public works, and parks and recreation departments visited Carlsbad eager to share extensive amounts of pertinent information. Providing examples of forms and flyers, they explained how they communicated with fire victims and the general public; anticipated and responded to questions; provided assistance and reassurance; assembled documentation; established and maintained a database of properties, including displaced residents; interfaced with media; dealt with FEMA; attacked problems such as debris, contamination and erosion control; and expedited processing for residents wishing to rebuild.

"Their help was invaluable," reported Pat Kelley, Carlsbad Principal Building Inspector, praising the meeting's dynamic combination of formal information and informal anecdotal data. "We promised Laguna Beach that we would 'pay them back' by helping another city down the line if and when disaster struck again."

He concluded, "Working with Laguna Beach was not only productive, informative and comforting; it was a heartening experience. It all comes down to pulling together to do what we as cities are established to do: serve people."

REBUILDING AND RECOVERY

"These aren't just numbers. These are people's homes."

—CARLSBAD PRINCIPAL BUILDING INSPECTOR PAT KELLEY

Starting From Ground Zero

Rebuilding may not have been the initial concern of the fire victims on October 22 as they dug through the rubble, licking their emotional wounds and trying to process the events of the past several hours, but it soon would be. The city wanted to be ready for them when it was.

Pat Kelley and his Community Development and Engineering colleagues had begun inspections of the area while fires still burned the night before. Helping people get back on track would be the underlying philosophy guiding operations in the months to come.

On October 24, Community Development Director Marty Orenyak wrote a letter of assurance to victimized homeowners, confirming, "The city is doing everything in its power to pull together resources and procedures which will assist you and expedite the process of rebuilding your homes." He cautioned against becoming a victim twice by being seduced by unlicensed workers or con artists out to make a quick buck. The consumer-oriented government publication, "What You Should Know Before You Hire A Contractor," was made available free to homeowners.

Orenyak concluded the letter by saying on behalf of the city, "We have every intention of helping you." That was not an empty promise. Among the services offered fire victims, the city:

- Waived permit requirements for demolition and debris removal.
- Offered free preliminary review of rebuild plans.
- Established a single-source contact to answer rebuilding questions.
- Provided a variety of needed information, addresses, phone numbers, publications and forms.

Bulletins outlining general guidelines on demolition, site security, planning and reconstruction were distributed to residents shortly after the fire, and updated as new information became available. In a sting operation designed to expose predators in the form of unlicensed contractors, six felony arrests were made on November 14 in La Costa. One of the so-called contractors had demanded \$6,000 down for demolition services he would probably never have provided in full.

The City Council adopted an "urgency ordinance" allowing the construction of the fire-destroyed homes "in substantially the same manner as they existed legally prior to the fire." The ordinance relieved those homes from setback standards adopted subsequent to original construction.

Other agencies joined the mission to assist. The county Board of Supervisors voted to allow each Harmony Grove fire victim to dump ten tons of debris in the (now-defunct) San Marcos landfill without charge.

7:50 PM Fire is reported at 7351 El Fuerte Street.

7:54 PM According to a cryptic police dispatch, "Wyatt Earp has been evicted."

7:56 PM Police are checking a residence at 3316 Fosca Street.

7:59 PM Five people in wheelchairs are trapped with fire reported in the backyard at 2632 Obelisco Court. Urgent assistance is requested to help get them out. Police respond immediately.

8:00 PM Carlsbad's Fleet Maintenance yard opens to make available 25,000 gallons of gasoline and 89,000 gallons of diesel fuel.

8:00 PM Fire is reported at 2964 Sondra Court.

8:01 PM Homes on Obelisco Court are reported to be on fire.

8:01 PM Fire dispatch responds there are not enough resources to respond at this time.

8:01 PM Elfin Forest firefighters are reported to be in need of fuel.



Waiving the usual calamity claim form, the county Assessor's Office offered a tax relief program in which a reduced property valuation would remain in effect until the property was rebuilt or repaired. The program also ensured that if the property was rebuilt in a similar manner, the property tax assessment would not be increased beyond what it was prior to the fire.

New Homes Grew Upon Ashes Of The Old

A number of the destroyed homes had been part of a tract built by Warmington Homes, which provided original sets of plans to the city. The plans were made available, free, to residents for reference when rebuilding, saving much time and money.

The decision was made NOT to waive all building permit fees, partly because in most cases, the true beneficiary would be the insurance companies, not the residents. Instead, the city sought ways to advance the rebuild process while ensuring that the direct beneficiary of services would be the residents. The stated intent was to "benefit all the homeowners with all levels of insurance coverage by restoring their homes to their original condition quickly and efficiently." To that end, the city offered:

- High-priority plan-check processing, including paying contract plan checkers overtime for five-day turnaround and providing special courier service.
- Saturday building inspections at no cost when necessary to expedite completion of the new homes.
- Allowable extended working hours, including Sunday construction, for rebuilding.

As of April 21, 1997, six months after the fire, building permits had been issued for eight homes, which were under construction. Another eight were in the plan-checking stage.

By the first anniversary of the fire, October 21, 1997, 33 homes were under construction and three families had moved into their newly rebuilt residences.

Eroding Hope Of FEMA Reimbursement Didn't Dampen Recovery Efforts

Carlsbad residents had seen fire, and soon they would see rain. The question of whether the federal government would consider Carlsbad's erosion control efforts reimbursable recovery or non-reimbursable mitigation would not be resolved for several months, but with the rainy season fast approaching, the city had to make a decision. It decided to act.

Principal Construction Inspector Richard E. Cook explained, "Carlsbad and its citizens simply couldn't wait until we received a blessing from a bureaucrat. We hoped we'd be reimbursed, but we would have done it anyway," he said of the sandbagging and other ambitious erosion control efforts — including around-the-clock work — initiated days after the fire.

"We weathered the storms that did occur. I think we did a good job. I know we did the right thing."

A short-term program to control storm drain run-off on public and private property was implemented right away. Engineering and Streets staff identified areas requiring drainage control and debris removal, and city crews were put on stand-by in case of heavy rain or other emergency.

8:06 PM SDSO reports 14 tons of chlorine in an unknown plant and stands by in case the chlorine begins to leak, which would necessitate a three-mile evacuation in the area.

8:09 PM Traffic control is being set up at Alga/Alicante Roads and Alga Road/El Camino Real.

8:11 PM Fire is reported at 2726 Obelisco Place, with nearby roofs on fire as well.

8:11 PM Houses are reported on fire on Obelisco Circle near Argonauta.

8:11 PM Police report that Bolero Street residents need to be evacuated.

8:16 PM Fire is reported at 2900 Sondra Court.

8:16 PM Structures are reported on fire at Corintia Street and Altisma Way.

8:17 PM Structures are reported on fire at Bolero Street and Managua Place.



WOMEN AT WORK

They're called honor crews and the Department of Correction's convicted felons who work on them appreciate the privilege for good behavior to be out of their cells and in the open air using their muscles. During the weeks following the October 1996 fire, Carlsbad was pleased to enjoy the massive benefits of dozens of female felons' hard work.

**WOMEN
AT
WORK**

"We tried to show our appreciation in small ways," reported Richard Cook. One day the women were treated to box lunches in the park. Another day the city bought them sodas, a real treat for prisoners.

With well over 6,000 free person-hours contributing to the month-long sandbagging effort, the \$76 dollars worth of soft drinks was quite a bargain. As a further perk to the crews, many of the women were pictured and praised in the local media.

Hubbard Construction assisted in clearing out large drainage areas to create desiltation basins, and the city offered sand and sandbags to the public at four convenient locations. Homes requiring perimeter sandbagging were attended to, and driveways and lots adjacent to fire-damaged homes were sandbagged as well. Maintaining Carlsbad's Declaration of Emergency gave workers legal access to private property to provide these vital services.

The city contracted with erosion control specialists, Woodward and Clyde, to prepare a comprehensive erosion control plan for the entire burn area within Carlsbad. The company came highly recommended by Laguna Beach, who had relied on Woodward and Clyde's expertise after its own coast-close conflagration.

Carlsbad's concerns focused on controlling the flow of ash and sediment into the almost completely restored Batiquitos Lagoon as well as the Pacific Ocean. Additional problem areas were the La Costa Resort and Spa flood plain and damage to other private property.

In regard to habitat preservation/restoration, the city decided to rely upon nature to revegetate the burn area. A hazardous materials team was sent to check for toxic run-off; fortunately, none was found.

A Storm Of Activity Before The Rain

Sandbagging efforts were already under way when rain hit on October 30. Showers continued into the following day, with no appreciable damage.

On that day, October 31, the California Department of Forestry, working with the Department of Corrections, began erosion control efforts with four honor crews made up of 75 female felons. According to Richard Cook, the regimented crews of disciplined workers performed exceptionally. "The effort they put in would make most of us guys blush," he confided.

In lightly falling rain, the women rose to the task, installing 2,000 sandbags. The work accomplished by them and others that day was impressive:

- A canyon on El Fuerte south of La Costa Meadows Elementary School was cleared of brush and trees; sandbag check dams were built; a temporary desiltation basin was constructed and free firewood was stacked at the curb.
- Storm drains were cleaned and ditches were cleared, as was the tributary into the San Marcos Creek at the Meadow Lark Treatment Plant.
- City and California Conservation Corps (CCC) crews filled sandbags and began bagging burned-out residences in the hard-hit Cadencia area.
- City crews painted house numbers on the curbs of destroyed homes.

Facing a hastening approach of potentially heavy rains, the work continued at breakneck speed. The CCC, CDF and San Diego Urban Corps work would be virtually cost-free, but priceless in terms of timeliness and efficiency.

On November 1 and beyond, critical check dams were installed as sandbagging and related projects continued. City staff advised residents in the fire-ravaged area to place sandbags around their homes to prevent possible mudslides triggered by early winter storms.

8:17 PM A Unified Incident Command base camp is established at Stagecoach Park, on the grounds surrounding the community center. Mutual aid support from Ventura is slated to arrive later this evening or early Tuesday morning.

8:18 PM Units are responding to structures on fire at Corintia Street and Altisma Way.

8:20 PM The "ladies at 2175 Argonauta" are reported to be out. Police officers cancel the previous evacuation call.

8:27 PM Rancho Santa Fe Road north of Melrose Drive is reported to be open to traffic.

8:28 PM The house at 2500 Unicornio is said to be "safe for now."

8:30 PM A staff person reports to the command post in Stagecoach Park to interface with the media.

8:39 PM An Escondido firefighter suffering from smoke inhalation and chest pains is transported to Scripps Hospital.



Thanks to the hard-working crews and forbearance of Mother Nature, November progress was steady. City officials met with Woodward and Clyde to discuss the long-term erosion control program, while multi-agency workers assiduously pursued short-term efforts. Most rock bags were purchased and some were filled by CCC and Urban Corps crews. In all, over 75,000 bags were installed and over 100 check dams built to control sediment and ash.

As Thanksgiving drew near, Pineapple Express rains and flash floods were in the forecast, but reality turned out to be much milder. A moderate 2.5-inch rain on November 21 caused no significant problems. Erosion control measures worked extremely well, and significant amounts of sediment and ash were trapped by the check dams. Hillsides held and residents who had feared the worst breathed a huge sigh of relief.

By mid-December, erosion control was judged a success. The installation of 180 check dams was complete. The dredging of the "Arizona crossing" — the only permanent sediment basin on San Marcos Creek — was effected to ensure proper functioning. A heavy rain on December 11 was monitored by Batiquitos Lagoon restoration officials, but the dams did their job, and the water journeying through the San Marcos Creek via Box Canyon flowed unpolluted into the Lagoon. Meanwhile, deep inside charred canyons, tiny spots of new green life peeked up through fire-blackened soil.

By the rainy season's end the following spring, Woodward and Clyde had guided the city through its pre-emptive strike; Hubbard Construction had completed basin cleanout and reconstruction; Carlsbad, CDF, CCC and Urban Corps crews had done yeoman's (and yeowoman's) work cleaning debris, clearing creek beds, reinforcing culverts and sandbagging private and public property. Again, Mother Nature had generously cooperated by withholding furious flood waters and instead raining down gently upon an area already devastated by one natural disaster that year.

The final erosion control costs of approximately \$280,000 eventually would be accepted by FEMA as part of the recovery, as opposed to mitigation, efforts, thereby qualifying for 75% federal reimbursement. Even had they not been accepted, the cost was far less, in terms of both money and potential human suffering, than might otherwise have been incurred.

- 8:40 PM Police are checking for elderly residents at 7319 Bolero Street.
- 8:43 PM Fire is reported in the area of Primental Lane.
- 9:00 PM Police officers report minor injuries from burning embers falling on them during evacuations.
- 9:10 PM A strike team is requested at Alga Road and Corte de la Vista.
- 9:11 PM Houses are reported threatened in the area of 2660 Marmol Place.
- 9:27 PM Four looting incidents are reported. All are later determined to be unfounded.
- 9:32 PM Due to the wide front of the fire, portions of Palomar Airport Road and El Camino Real are closed. La Costa Avenue is also barricaded near the fire area.
- 9:55 PM Police are evacuating a resident at 6845 El Fuerte Street.



"Not a pretty sight" was the consensus of the group touring a scorched Southeast Carlsbad one week after the fire. Far left, Carlsbad Mayor Claude A. "Bud" Lewis; second from left, Carlsbad City Manager Ray Patchett; second from right, Carlsbad Engineering Director Lloyd Hubbs; far right, FEMA Director James Witt.

REIMBURSEMENT

"To be or not to be, that is the question."

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

An Uphill Battle ...

FEMA Proclaims A Declaration Of Emergency, Not Disaster

The Harmony Grove fire: a disaster, or merely an emergency?

Just as minor surgery is something that happens to someone else and major surgery is something that happens to you, to the Carlsbad residents who lost their homes, the fire was a major disaster. To the federal government, it was a more "minor" emergency. The difference went beyond semantics; critical reimbursement to people and agencies was at stake.

A few months before the October 1996 fire, floods devastated northern California. A few months hence, severe winter storms struck the Midwest. Each of those two disasters was declared a disaster by the federal government. North County's smaller-scale disaster was not.

President Clinton's October 1996 Declaration of Emergency and January 1997 denial of a major disaster declaration meant that fire-impacted citizens and cities would not be eligible for certain federal funding and relief programs. The United States Small Business Administration (SBA) did grant 18 of 55 requests for loans totalling \$1 million to 15 homeowners and three businesses in the Harmony Grove fire area. These loans carried an interest rate of 4 percent and were available to credit-worthy fire victims whose property and/or personal damages were not covered by insurance. Victims could qualify for up to \$200,000 of property damage and up to \$40,000 for personal property losses. Businesses could qualify for up to \$1.5 million covering damaged property, equipment and inventory.

Hierarchy Of Help

The ladder of declarations began at the city level and rose higher in a preset pattern. Eighteen hours after the Harmony Grove fire entered Carlsbad, the first rungs of the ladder had been climbed. Local emergencies had been declared, in the requisite order, by the city of Carlsbad, the county of San Diego and the state of California.

Governor Wilson's proclamation on the morning of October 22 authorized state reimbursement of local firefighting costs, made mutual aid mandatory from other local and state agencies and cleared emergency purchases. It also represented the final rung up on the ladder to national assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in Washington, D.C.

10:00 PM The National Weather Service forecast advises: "High wind warning for northern coastal areas of San Diego County until noon Tuesday ... tonight, northeast winds 35-45 mph ... Tuesday northeast winds 35-45 mph ... decreasing during the late morning."

10:00 PM Assistant City Manager Frank Mannen announces that 50 homes have burned in Carlsbad.

10:10 PM San Diego County Chief Administrative Officer Lawrence Prior proclaims a State of Emergency. This proclamation is ratified the next morning as the first order of business by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

10:15 PM A fire task force responds to the El Fuerte area.

10:45 PM A fire crew patrols hot spots in Alga Road area.

10:56 PM A media crew wants to get through at El Camino Real/Alga Road.



In keeping with required legal protocol, Governor Wilson wrote a letter to President Clinton on October 22, formally requesting a major Disaster Declaration for Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties. On October 23, although not declaring a Disaster, President Clinton instead declared an Emergency. That Declaration was subsequently closed on October 31, meaning that all damages reimbursed had to be a direct result of the emergency and must have occurred between October 21 through October 31, a period FEMA termed “the incident period for FEMA-3120-EM, Severe Fires.” That ruling was amended the following spring to include certain erosion control efforts continuing beyond October 31.

The decision to declare an Emergency, although arguable, was not arbitrary. Each Declaration of Disaster or Emergency is based on several factors, including number of people impacted, dollar amount of damages, and kinds and amount of costs incurred by involved municipalities.

The scope of federal assistance provided municipalities shrinks under an Emergency as opposed to a Disaster Declaration. In Carlsbad's case, for instance, under a major Disaster Declaration, repair/replacement of the city's \$180,000 loss of trees and irrigation systems might have been eligible for reimbursement. Under the Emergency Declaration, federal assistance was limited to reimbursement of only those costs associated with narrow emergency measures and debris removal.

Although fire victims did receive the same temporary housing assistance under both a federal Emergency and Disaster Declaration, other forms of assistance automatically triggered by a Disaster Declaration, such as the Individual Family Grant Program, were not available.

When the federal government proclaimed an Emergency Declaration for the counties of Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego on October 23, it enabled those areas to receive federal assistance for four programs:

- Temporary housing — allows those whose residences cannot be occupied to apply for rental assistance.
- Response — allows local governments to recover emergency response costs.
- Overtime — allows for the recovery of overtime costs incurred in fighting the fires.
- Debris removal — provides funding to local governments for cleanup.

Subsequent to the Declaration, FEMA and the California Office of Emergency Services (OES) dispatched four damage assessment teams to the area to determine public and private damage. The county Office of Disaster Preparedness assured that listed programs would be available almost immediately, and that based on the findings of the teams, more programs might be made available for private citizens and businesses.

Recognizing that remuneration for soil conservation efforts might be problematic, the Office's Director, Daniel J. Eberle, emphasized, “With the rainy season approaching, it is imperative that this issue be addressed.” It was, to great success, as detailed previously in this Chronicle.

They Came, They Saw, They Said No

“I'm here today to work with the mayor and the state to see what we have and what we can do with the resources at hand,” said FEMA Director James Witt as he toured a charred La Costa on October 28. Although he promised swift financial aid, Witt's noncommittal statement and refusal to estimate the extent of financial aid were harbingers of the upgrade denial two months hence.

11:00 PM A Carlsbad fire crew on duty in Elfin Forest responds to a request for immediate assistance at Lone Jack Road.

11:02 PM A CDF firefighter with an eye injury is transported for medical treatment.

11:02 PM Firefighters in the fire area report problems with people running over the hoses.

11:11 PM A possible male looter with black hair driving a white moped is reported on Argonauta.

11:30 PM A Carlsbad fire crew is assigned to manage hot spots at La Costa Avenue and Camino de los Coches.

11:30 PM La Costa Meadows, Mission Estancia, La Costa Heights, Olivenhain Pioneer Elementary and La Costa Canyon High schools are announced closed for Tuesday, October 22.

11:45 PM Meals and beverages are being delivered to troops in the field as well as to workers at Fleet Maintenance, Stagecoach Park and the EOC.

THIS TAPE IS RED, WHITE AND BLUE ...

CITY FINANCE DEPARTMENT HANDLES FEMA COUNTDOWN AND COMPUTER CONVERSION, TOO

From stencils to staple guns; from stakes to sandbags; from a chainsaw digging into the ground to a helicopter performing aerial reconnaissance above the earth; every firefighting-related cost incurred by the city, no matter how large or small, was documented by the Finance Department.

CEMAT's finance representative, Hilary Hogan, a city accountant, was out of town on vacation when the fire occurred. The cumbersome work began before she returned, but it did not end until January 1997 when all minutely detailed documents were submitted to FEMA to determine eligibility for reimbursement by federal and/or state government.

As soon as the fire hit Carlsbad, Finance Department employees blazed into action, creating emergency timecards for each employee involved in fighting the fire. In addition to the obvious firefighters and police officers, the list included EOC workers and dozens of other full-time, part-time and temporary employees.

Full documentation was required for each person, including hours, location and work performed. With over 100 workers initially devoting all their time to performing their emergency duties, there was not time to report the minutia of what, where, how, why and when they were doing while they were doing it, necessitating arduous backtracking after the crisis was over.

"We knew we had to get everything in writing for potential future reimbursement, but we were clearly aware that our most crucial task was handling the emergency at hand," noted Hogan.

All materials utilized had to be painstakingly documented. Special accounts were set up to cover items such as equipment rentals, outside

services, supplies and miscellaneous materials. The daily cost of operating Stagecoach Park was calculated in an attempt to recover the costs of operating the command post and base camp at that site.

Everything was tracked. One partial list of costs incurred at the base camp was delineated as followed:

Equipment Supplies

Trash bags, 1 box.....	\$18.80
Disinfectant, 2 bottles, \$11.24 each.....	\$22.48
Paper towels, 1 case.....	\$25.18
Dispenser soap, 2 1-gallon bottles at \$3.32 each	\$6.64
Box soap, 5 boxes at \$3.33 each	\$16.65
Toilet paper, 2 cases at \$30.00 each.....	\$60.00
Toilet seat covers, 1 case.....	\$35.05

Employee overtime accounted for a large part of the costs. (Regular employee time spent as well as management employee time and overtime were not eligible for reimbursement.) Eligible employee overtime costs alone totaled \$55,000. Total employee costs approached four times that amount.

Over \$180,000 was incurred through the destruction or severe damage of over 100 city trees during the fire. The location (including which side of the property!), species, diameter, type of loss, replacement cost and related expenses such as a backflow device and arborist consultation, were itemized.

Fleet Operations tracked all fuel costs, by department, employee, date, time, type and number of gallons dispensed. It also recorded the gasoline and diesel fuel supplied to Vista, San Pasqual, Escondido, La Mesa, Sycuan, Lemon

Grove, Alpine, Viejas, Ramona, Camp Pendleton and other fire departments.

All erosion control and additional post-fire costs were carefully documented. Although the city was uncertain whether its common-sense contention that sandbagging efforts were part of recovery (as opposed to mitigation, as the federal government was to argue) would be accepted for reimbursement, it diligently kept meticulous records of each item, down to the cans of soda pop provided to the female felons working on the project.

Add to the certainties of death and taxes a third: government red tape. Making the task even more burdensome was FEMA's "primitive" internal systems, maintained Hillary Hogan.

"In this age of technology, FEMA still wasn't functioning on computers, so each of the forms and worksheets had to be re-created on our system," she noted in amazement. Since most administrative costs would not be covered by FEMA, the city could not even recoup the money spent coaxing FEMA into the computer age.

Witt's touring companion, OES Program Manager David Fukutomi, also hinted at the December ruling when he said recovery must begin at the local level. He remarked, "Not one agency can solve all the problems. We need to take federal, state and most important, local [resources] and stitch them together to get things on their way."

While Witt and other federal, state and local emergency officials surveyed the area, Carlsbad's erosion control efforts continued. As fall turned into winter and sandbags were installed, the rains fell, check dams held, and the labyrinthine process meandered slowly on.

FEMA and OES staff briefed local officials on available aid in November 1996, and though it was determined that FEMA would pay 75 percent, the state 18.75 percent and local agencies 6.25 percent of reimbursable costs, expenditures were still being tallied. Most of the approximately \$12 million in damage to homes throughout the Harmony Grove fire area would be covered by individual homeowner insurance.

The Paper Chase

While Carlsbad staff implemented mitigation and recovery efforts, many employees set about the monumental task of collecting, organizing and copying full records and down-to-the-penny documentation of expenses, for presentation to FEMA.

Management journeyed through the necessary channels to request an upgraded declaration. United States Senator Barbara Boxer corresponded directly with FEMA Director James Witt to ask his help "in breaking an administrative logjam that is preventing victims of the recent Southern California fires from receiving federal loan assistance."

In her December 11, 1996 letter Boxer noted, "If FEMA declares a major disaster, then SBA will automatically activate its federal loan program. On the other hand, if FEMA limits its declaration to an emergency, then the State of California will request a disaster declaration from the Administrator of SBA, who has indicated that he will act on it expeditiously. SBA is ready to issue applications under either scenario, but they have stated that they cannot act until FEMA declares either a disaster or an emergency." In other words, impacted homeowners would qualify for SBA loans no matter what, but the process could not begin until FEMA responded to the request for an upgraded declaration.

As a Carlsbad resident, Dan Hammer, Boxer's San Diego County Community Representative, felt a twofold commitment to ensuring optimum federal attention right from the beginning. "After seeing the fire while I drove home from work, I immediately called the Senator, who asked me to set up a call with Witt. Due to her and others' requests, he was out on the scene within days. We continued to remind FEMA that these were not just pieces of paper on a desk, they represented people's lives."

Hammer also believed, "The steady and persistent but never obnoxious efforts of Carlsbad Division Chief Mike Smith made a significant difference in the proceedings and final outcome."

Finally, on December 26, 1996, FEMA wrote a long and winding letter to Governor Wilson, detailing the chain of events to that point; listing services provided, costs incurred, eligibilities granted and the like. Buried in the second sentence of paragraph six on page two was perhaps the shortest and most to-the-point sentence of the entire letter: "Therefore, I must inform you that your request for a major disaster is denied."

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22

Before dawn, some roadblocks will come down and anxious residents will be allowed back into their neighborhoods to determine if they still have a home, and if so, in what condition it exists.

12:08 AM The Carlsbad City Council holds the first of four sessions to take place on this day. At this special emergency session, it ratifies the City Manager's proclamation of a State of Local Emergency.

12:11 AM Houses on Xana Way are evacuated.

12:30 AM A total of 191 people are sheltered at San Marcos High, with 25 more at San Dieguito Academy.

12:35 AM Rancho Santa Fe Road is reopened.

12:56 AM Upon investigation, the earlier report of a looter on a moped is determined to be "a homeowner getting his stuff out."

1:00 AM The perimeter of the fire runs from the north end of Alga Road and Melrose Drive to

A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE CHIEF — DECEMBER 1996



Dennis J. Van Der Maaten,
Carlsbad Fire Chief

This year will forever be remembered as one of devastation, filled with emotion due to the loss of property and personal possessions resulting from the "Harmony Grove Firestorm of 1996."

The evening of October 21, 1996 clearly brought with it a monumental test of this community's ability to respond to a rapidly escalating emergency of catastrophic proportions. While the personal losses of our citizens make it more difficult to recount our response to the event with a sense of pride, it is important that each of us acknowledges that as a team, we made a significant difference. Without the quick actions taken on the fire line, in the Public Safety Dispatch Center, the Emergency Operations Center, the emergency City Council meetings and in every individual office of every department of the City, our losses most certainly would have been much greater.

TO OUR FIREFIGHTERS AND POLICE OFFICERS:

Your efforts that evening were truly magnificent. The dedication of fire and police personnel in just this one instance reminded all of us of the dangerous yet necessary job you do every day, even though many of your selfless acts will never be totally documented. As I stood in the ruin of property in our community, I was in awe of the work done by fire, police and emergency professionals. We can all be proud of the care taken and heroism demonstrated by the men and women who sought to save lives and property unfortunate enough to be caught in the path of the disaster. You can be certain that we are all extremely proud of your bravery and dedication to duty.

TO THE STAFF OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCH CENTER AND EMERGENCY OPERATING CENTER:

Your preparedness, competence, quick actions, clear thinking and effective decision-making enabled the management team to remain ahead of the curve with respect to planning the action necessary to meet the needs of our victims, and our people on the fire line.

TO THE OTHER HEROES WHO WORKED BEHIND THE SCENE:

You toiled late into that evening and the next day, in offices throughout the City. Your support of the Emergency Operating Center and the Field Command Post was essential to the success we experienced.

Thanks to the foresight and leadership of our City Council and City Manager, we had an emergency plan to guide us through the event. Of course, the plan did not cover all the contingencies we encountered during those hectic 24 hours, but our resourceful employees recognized what was needed, and got it done in exemplary fashion.

I am personally extremely proud to wear the Carlsbad Fire Department patch that identifies me as a member of the Carlsbad Team. My hat is off to all the fine members of our "City Team." You were there to help our citizens through the most destructive and devastating event in the City of Carlsbad's history.

In conclusion, thank you one and all, for all that you do every day to protect the lives and property of our citizens!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dennis J. Van Der Maaten". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dennis J. Van Der Maaten

The wheels put in motion by Carlsbad's Proclamation of Emergency at 6:25 pm on October 21 ground to a halt on December 26. OES advised against appealing the denial. The erosion control work continued, as did the city's massive paper chase, to ensure that Carlsbad would receive maximum reimbursement for every cost accepted by FEMA under the Emergency Declaration.

The battle over erosion control — recovery or mitigation — finally ended in June 1997, when after much discussion and reams of documentation, FEMA accepted the bulk of the efforts as reimbursable recovery.

the west on El Fuerte Street. Officials verify that the majority of structural damage has occurred in the Cadencia area, with most homes damaged or lost north of La Costa Avenue. Smoke remains east and south of Stagecoach Park to the south city limits east of Rancho Santa Fe Road.

1:30 AM Building inspection staff begin damage assessment efforts.

1:45 AM The Harmony Grove fire is declared 48 percent contained. A total of 54 Carlsbad homes have been completely destroyed.

2:00 AM The Unified Incident Command management team holds a meeting to plan for the next operational period, 7:00 am - 7:00 pm.

2:30 AM The Red Cross opens a Resource Center at Mission Estancia elementary school.

ONE SURVIVOR'S PERSPECTIVE

It's a cliché but it's nevertheless true: hindsight is 20/20. Several months after the fire, Carlsbad Division Chief Mike Smith candidly acknowledged, "Looking back, there are things we could have done differently; things we should have done differently; ways in which we can improve."

Resident Pat Bleha vehemently agreed. As a longtime Carlsbad resident who lost a huge chunk of her life when her family's home of two decades burned to the ground, and as someone who was in the house while the fire brazenly stormed into Carlsbad, Bleha deserved to be heard.

"I didn't even realize we lived in a fire-prone area," was her first comment. "I wish I had been made aware of how close the chaparral areas really were to my house, and that fires of some magnitude had occurred in the past and could occur again."

She took issue as well with official notification — rather, the lack of it — on the afternoon of the fire. As she drove home a little after 4:00 pm that Monday, she knew the fire was "out there" somewhere, but had no idea how quickly "out there" could become "right here." She said the city and media should have warned residents of the fire's location and possible wind-shifts. (After this conversation took place, the Carlsbad City Council approved funding for a telephonic emergency

system; an automatic dialer that would pinpoint and notify people by specific neighborhoods.)

As the clock neared 6:00 pm, Bleha was in the kitchen cooking dinner. She saw smoke and wind, and went out to tie down her patio furniture, but heard no sirens or bullhorns. "Why didn't anyone tell us how close the fire was to our neighborhood? We received no warning to evacuate." The television reports were woefully behind the times, she said, and evacuations were never effected in her neighborhood, which ended up bearing the brunt of the fire.

"Why, in this age of technology, didn't the police or fire department tell us that the winds could switch at any time, putting us in danger?"

Believing that fire officials miscalculated, Bleha conceded that the fire took an erratic turn, but strongly felt residents should have been given an opportunity to make a choice based on full information. "I've heard that to avoid being sued, fire departments hesitate to tell people to evacuate unless and until it's a dire emergency situation, for fear of vandalism. But I think they should advise us and let us decide."

Bleha also expressed anger at the way the fire was handled, on both a regional and local basis. "Los Angeles got the resources we needed, and more efforts are being focused on their fire needs right now," she reported in June 1997, citing a newspaper article about

state-funded upgrades to that area's firefighting capacities.

The local radio system proved "totally inadequate," said Bleha, a view shared by many of the firefighters and agencies involved. "And we should have been able to get more updates from the city and TV as the fire was occurring," she stressed.

Bleha does not exempt herself from responsibility. "I should have had a plan," said the woman, laughing at how she must have looked first jogging around her house to clear her mind, then tearing through the kitchen grabbing her grandmother's holiday recipes while her neighborhood was becoming engulfed in smoke. "I was angry at myself for not realizing the dangers inherent in our location, in not having catalogued our possessions or deciding what to take with me before it was too late to think clearly."

She also praised the friends, neighbors, firefighters, Red Cross workers, other volunteers and anonymous good Samaritans who helped her family through this extremely difficult time.

However, more information, advance notification, a faster response ("Where were the police telling us to leave? Where were the fire trucks that should have been there helping to save our homes?") and better technology to fight the fire: these are the concerns Bleha insisted must be addressed.

LESSONS LEARNED

"A fire like this will happen again. The formula is there."

—CHARLES MANER, CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY
BATTALION CHIEF AND UNIFIED INCIDENT COMMANDER
OF THE HARMONY GROVE FIRE

A wise historian once said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. In an attempt to improve the city's response to a fire next time, suggestions were tendered from many sources.

Individual and group debriefings were held within and among departments and involved agencies. Input from citizens impacted was taken seriously into account as well. Many city employees offered assessments from a dual vantage point: they were involved not only as responders to the crisis, but also as involuntary participants whose homes were threatened.

Police Department Suggestions

A week after the fire, debriefings were conducted for Carlsbad police staff. According to the ensuing report, "All involved officers and communicators were fairly unanimous in believing that the response went extremely well; unusually well considering the gravity and complexity of this incident, and the serious threat to life and property."

Nevertheless, several areas of concern were addressed. Among them were the need for:

- **ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL** at the command post to disseminate better and more timely information (regarding fire path, road closures, evacuation sites, etc.) to all troops in the field and personnel back at the station.
- **PREASSIGNED DUTIES** for senior police volunteers.
- **FASTER SETUP** of the command post, evacuation sites, barricades and food/beverage conduits.
- **MORE SAFETY EQUIPMENT**, including masks and goggles to combat smoke and embers for officers handling evacuation and traffic control.

3:00 AM Daniel J. Eberle, Director of the UDC Office of Disaster Preparedness, reports that overall the Harmony Grove fire "has burned at least 4,500 acres ... 60 structures have burned. More structures are threatened. There are 375 firefighters on scene ... There are currently three shelters opened, sheltering over 200 people. The Humane Society and the Animal Rescue Reserve are taking care of the livestock in the area. The cities of Carlsbad, Encinitas and San Marcos have proclaimed local emergencies."

3:30 AM Streets crew members who are no longer needed are sent home on a staggered basis.

5:00 AM Streets crew members who had not worked on Monday night report in and are sent to roadblocks in burned areas to begin clearing debris from sidewalks and roadways.

5:30 AM Building inspection and engineering staff begin conducting on-site appraisals and



Ray Patchett,
Carlsbad City Manager

TAKING THE HEAT ... SOME VIEWS FROM THE TOP

"We can mess up a lot of things and fix them, but we can't afford to mess up on an emergency, because that can't be fixed."

Carlsbad City Manager Ray Patchett knew those words well. He said them every time city employees practiced an integrated response to an emergency.

The citywide practice scheduled for November 7, 1996 turned out to be unnecessary after the hands-on "practice" everyone received on October 21. Patchett pointed with pride to employees' handling of the situation. "We're all here to serve. Everyone did what they were supposed to do, and much more."

Acknowledging that the city was embroiled in a small number of lawsuits from citizens who disagreed with his assessment several months after the fire, Patchett nevertheless steadfastly maintained, "We did what we thought was necessary and right at the time."

THE FIRE'S PATH WAS NOT PREDICTABLE; ITS INEVITABILITY WAS

Rancho Santa Fe Deputy Fire Chief Dallas Neville, observed, "The fire was predictable, although the magnitude of it was not. The last large fire at the point of origin had been in 1943, so there was a lot of brush. Elfin Forest is a typical rural Southern California area, with lots of brush and limited road entry, where Santa Ana winds push the fire on a path that follows the terrain into highly developed areas. We've fought this fire on paper many times."

One positive result of the fire was an agreement in February 1997 between fire officials and conservation groups to clear vegetation in certain habitat areas and to enable firefighters to abate land adjacent to structures and roadways.

At the time of the fire, Carlsbad's weed abatement program annually identified and abated hazards on 1,000-1,200 parcels within the city. A major focus of the program was maintaining defensible space along the interface of wildland areas and development. The city's stated landscape standards required 60 feet of managed vegetation between structures and undisturbed native vegetation. As Assistant City Manager Frank Mannen noted, strong habitat requirements will result in an increased interface as development continues toward buildout, making fire-safe precautions an ongoing need in Carlsbad.

Carlsbad Battalion Chief Sonny Hilliard made a strong statement to home builders and owners. "For some 70 years, every time an urban interface fire occurs in Southern California, the after-action report repeats the same advice: Use only non-combustible roofs and room additions to homes. Avoid planting mature, burnable landscaping close to the house. Clear the areas around structures on the property."

Hilliard offered a somber final insight. "Once a wildfire takes off and becomes huge and is driven by the wind, it cannot be stopped. It is beyond the control of man. There are simply not enough equipment and human resources available and you cannot accurately predict which way the wind will take it. Unfortunately, we have no fortune tellers on our staff."

Emergency Operating Center Suggestions

Reflecting back on 24 hours of intense involvement, EOC workers carefully examined all facets of their efforts, praising their colleagues' prioritizing skills, efficiency, composure, leadership, professionalism and cooperation as key to the largely successful response to the EOC's "baptism by fire."

They also assessed their shortcomings with severe candor. Improvements were encouraged in several areas:

COMMUNICATIONS

- Enhance communications within EOC and between EOC and other employees/facilities.
- Install a community service information bank that makes data on public services and accurate updates accessible to the public.
- Establish a single media contact person at the command post.
- Establish a multiple-call-in hotline that provides continuously updated information.
- Utilize bilingual staff capabilities.

TECHNOLOGY

- Establish a designated EOC e-mail address linked to all city facilities.
- Provide ability to contact staff via radio and cell phone.
- Gain access to mapping, engineering, planning and building data.

TRAINING

- Educate back-up employees and volunteers.
- Increase emergency training for all city employees.

EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES

- Maintain updated address/phone lists of employees, schools, water districts and other local agencies.
- Keep copiers, faxes, TVs, computers, printers and other equipment in peak operating condition.
- Maintain current maps, zoning/parcel information, phone books and other data.

FACILITIES

- Provide overnight accommodations for workers at EOC headquarters.
- Utilize library buildings as a safe haven where citizens can gather and receive timely information and support.
- Maintain an emergency skeleton staff at all satellite city facilities.

Multiple Agencies Stressed The Need For Improved Communications

At a San Diego County Sheriff's Office (SDSO) debriefing held one week after the fire, representatives from SDSO-San Marcos and Encinitas, the California Highway Patrol and Carlsbad fire and police departments expressed frustration with their inability to communicate directly with allied agencies. Cell phones and land

generating computerized reports back at the office.

9:00 AM After its five members had been up most or all of the night monitoring the fire, the City Council convenes for the second emergency meeting of the day to receive a status update.

10:00 AM Governor Pete Wilson arrives to tour the fire-stricken areas.

10:15 AM Governor Wilson declares a State of Emergency and requests a presidential Declaration of Disaster.

3:00 PM The Carlsbad City Council convenes for the third emergency meeting of the day.

4:00 PM Carlsbad Community Services staff establishes a children's recreation center at the American Red Cross Resource Center at Mission Estancia School.

6:00 PM The City Council convenes for the fourth meeting of the day, this time at its regularly scheduled Tuesday evening session. A

A CONVERSATION WITH DENNIS VAN DER MAATEN

"Fires seem to follow me around," joked Carlsbad Fire Chief Dennis Van Der Maaten, who after 29 years of service had seen action in a number of major events, including the Oakland fire and other conflagrations throughout California.

Fire was no laughing matter to him, however; in an interview after the Harmony Grove fire, he shared his inescapable conclusions gleaned from often-harrowing and always sobering experiences. First off is the need for people to recognize the Southern California dilemma. "We build where fire lives." He believed it therefore behooves developers and residents to take a systems approach to fire prevention. By so doing, he explained, "it allows fire departments to be proactive rather than reactive." With fire-smart construction and landscaping techniques bolstered by an adequate communications system, firefighters would still have to face the elements of nature, but they could better place engines and personnel to protect threatened areas.

Describing fire as "a very persistent teacher from whom we continue to learn lessons," Van Der Maaten strode boldly out on a limb, stating, "I'm convinced that if we had all non-combustible roofs, we wouldn't have lost one house in Carlsbad." In support of this statement, he noted that the tile-roofed homes that burned were destroyed as a result of burning fuel from combustible roofs.

Pointing out that the building industry and residents often have been reluctant to optimize fire prevention procedures ("Fire services are often at odds with development"), Van Der Maaten singled out construction and defensible space as two critical priorities in Southern California. In a nutshell, according to the Chief, an ideal prevention program should include:

- Maintaining a defensible space of 100 feet around homes.
- Avoiding developments that incorporate narrow, meandering roads with poor access.
- Using only non-combustible roofs.
- Employing other construction techniques such as residential fire sprinklers, closed-in decks, dual- and triple-glazed windows (to keep out radiant heat that can set drapes on fire) and eschewing large overhanging eaves as well as combustible vegetation close to the house.

Being proactive by controlling what can be controlled through a systems approach gives firefighters a chance to succeed in what they're trying to achieve, said Dennis Van Der Maaten: "Keep your house from burning down."

lines became unavailable for use, due to the heavy demands on the system as well as fire damage and terrain. Both police and fire officials indicated problems with their portable radios in various areas, noting that communications regarding where to send concerned family members/relatives/friends of fire victims was insufficient.

Speaking before the Carlsbad City Council on November 5, 1996, Fire Chief Dennis Van Der Maaten castigated the antiquated system, saying it left hundreds of firefighters with just four frequencies during the fire. "When you think of over 100 fire units using four frequencies, it doesn't take a mental giant to see that the system is going to overload at some point," he bluntly observed, explaining, "It was almost impossible to coordinate field forces with incident command staffs. Everyone was basically freelancing, and that's not the most efficient way to fight a fire."

In a newspaper interview conducted subsequent to the fire, Rancho Santa Fe Fire Chief Erwin Willis described the frustration personnel experienced communicating with dispatchers in the fast-moving blaze. They would request resources to combat one hot spot, and when sparks ignited another spot, they couldn't connect with dispatchers in time to send engines to the new location to stop the fire.

Ironically, the radio communications system in place at the time of the October 1996 Harmony Grove fire was purchased after the 1970 Laguna fire, when the then-current system proved insufficient to handle that monumental emergency. The over-taxing of the upgraded system during the Harmony Grove fire dramatically demonstrated the need for the new regional 800 MHz radio system under development at the time of the blaze.

The proposed \$83 million system was approved by the county Board of Supervisors in December 1995. During summer 1997, the project was partially completed but still in limbo due to the November 1996 passage of Proposition 218, which required a referendum on new assessments.

According to Chief Van Der Maaten, who spearheaded the establishment of and chaired the 13-member board of directors of the Regional Communications System, the system would increase the number of frequencies from four or five to 130, providing as many as 1,200 different "talk groups." The funding and governance would derive from users of the system throughout all of San Diego county as well as Imperial and portions of Riverside counties.

"It would be a true regional system, with separate backbones and transparent operation," he noted. By August 1997, while lawyers and bureaucrats argued over the vote to be taken and whether it would be a simple majority or two-thirds vote referendum, installation of most of the 43 transmitter sites was completed.

"Users could potentially hook onto the system in 1998," said Van Der Maaten. Firefighters hoped the issue would be resolved before another major fire proved the grave necessity for the system.

special update is conducted, with staff reports presented on fire, police, shelter and damage assessment activities.

OCTOBER 23

8:00 AM A UDC status report estimates full containment of the Harmony Grove fire by 6:00 pm today, with full control estimated by 6:00 pm on October 24. It also notes full containment of the Rincon fire, partial containment of the Otay Mountain fire and full containment of the October 22 San Marcos fire.

Also that day, the federal government proclaims a Declaration of Emergency for the counties of Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego, allowing these areas, and fire-impacted residents who reside in them, to receive federal assistance.

6:00 PM The fire is declared fully contained, with full control projected at this time the following day.

OCTOBER 24

6:00 PM The fire is declared fully controlled.

THE STRATEGY OF SECOND-GUESSING

Firefighting agencies are organized to prevent and combat all types of fire common to an area. However, since one-house fires and small brush fires occur with far greater frequency than huge conflagrations, departments maintain the equipment and personnel to manage routine daily threats in an efficient manner.

In addition to frequency of occurrence, financial wherewithal must be taken into account. The cost to taxpayers of maintaining an arsenal of equipment and cadre of firefighters capable of stopping a wildfire of immense magnitude or preventing every house from going up in flames once the fire reaches a highly developed area of combustible structures with dense vegetation would be prohibitive. And perhaps futile.

Consider this: two or three engines and as many as 15-18 personnel respond to a typical house fire. On the night of October 21, 1996, had one engine been positioned at every house in Carlsbad, it would have been virtually impossible to save them all. Over and over, in separate conversations with seasoned staff from multijurisdictional agencies, officials interviewed for this report emphasized that due to the fast-moving nature of the fire, the size and traveling pattern of embers, and the highly combustible

structures, even had every regional resource been in place, they might have been able to save a few more of the 54 homes lost. But only maybe. And only a few.

Although firefighters from all area agencies had studied urban interface wildfires, wind-driven fires are erratic. Each in its own way. In the case of Harmony Grove, natural and man-made obstacles — including steep terrain, sparsity of access roads, congestion of looky-loos in the brush of Harmony Grove and on the streets of La Costa, inadequacies of the radio communications system, predominance of wood-roofed houses with dense combustible vegetation in close proximity, not to mention the high-wind Santa Anas shifting the direction and increasing the velocity and ferocity of the blaze — made the fire a far different and more formidable opponent in reality than on paper.

"The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft-a-gley," declared Scottish poet Robert Burns, whose words rang true to some extent in this event. Among the strategies considered and/or utilized during the Harmony Grove fire were these:

- Normally some resources would be deployed to control and/or stop the fire, while other resources would be deployed to protect structures. With the fast-

spreading fire and limited resources in both Harmony Grove and in Carlsbad, all efforts were directed toward structure protection instead of suppression.

- Before the wind kicked up in Harmony Grove, CDF had planned to push the fire into an old burn where it would run out of fuel. The strategy of holding Questhaven Road could not be put into action because homes were threatened, causing all engines to be committed to structure protection, as noted above. The wind velocity increased, the fire jumped the road and toward dusk jumped again into Carlsbad.
- Both in Harmony Grove and in Carlsbad, backfire strategies "backfired," due to spectators in the brush and in the way. Setting a backfire in the brush along Rancho Santa Fe Road near Cadencia was intended to burn the fuel between the main fire and the homes in the development, in effect turning the fire away from the threatened homes. Due to an entire ridge of gawkers, this strategy could not be pursued.
- Once the fire entered Carlsbad, the goal was to keep the fire south of Alga Road and east of El Camino Real. Thanks in large part to the wind abating late that Monday evening, this objective was achieved.
- Amid Carlsbad's fire-clogged neighborhoods, firefighters pursued a positioning strategy designed to guard homes not on fire. Engines were positioned around the perimeter of homes on fire — between those homes and homes not on fire — to save the latter. By and large, this strategy worked.
- Personnel managing the fire had to make difficult on-the-spot decisions, choosing homes to protect on the basis of the likelihood of saving each home. They were forced to operate under the triage theory that it is better to save one home out of two than to lose both, if one is clearly indefensible.

THE PHOENIX PRINCIPLE

"The Escondido fireman who helped save our house visited me after the fire. He said he usually didn't come back, but that this time he became emotionally involved. We hugged."

—PAT LUEDKE

Of Phoenician or perhaps Greek origin, the word phoenix refers to a fabled bird that would live for some 500 years, then destroy itself by fire, rising from the ashes to begin life anew. In early Egypt, the mythological, purple-red phoenix was the symbol of the rising sun. It has evolved into a cross-cultural symbol of resurrection, regeneration and immortality.

Life goes on, is the moral of the story. People, however painfully, manage to surmount tragedies and rise from the rubble to begin life anew.

The phoenix is an especially apt icon for the Harmony Grove fire of October 1996. Nowhere was the phoenix principle more in evidence than within the earth itself.

A bare month after the fire, Tahlia M. Marlin's front-page feature in the November 24 *North County Times* poetically noted, "Deep inside the charred canyon nestled in the heart of La Costa are little puffs of green engulfed in a blackened sea of trees and bushes and rocky soil. They are few and far between, but they are there — bright green patches of reborn vegetation pushing their way up through the charred roots of its parent plant. Despite being surrounded by broken and brittle chaparral, life is once again blooming in this area."

Surveying the scene of his erosion control efforts, Carlsbad's Richard Cook concluded, "Mother Nature is pretty amazing." Already, the slopes were in great shape; the rains had been enough but not too much, and even without man-made reseeding, hardy plants were sprouting up.

Some folks helped Mother Nature along. A few days before Christmas, residents from the Corona La Costa community, many of whose homes had suffered smoke damage but luckily no worse, gathered to replant some of the natural flora in La Costa Canyon. Neighbors donated \$800 to buy native plants and seeds from local nurseries, many of which gave some material away free.

The enthusiastic gardeners returned several weeks later to view the budding California poppies, African daisies, Lupin and blue-eyed grass. They planted shrubs to replace trees and brush cut down during the fire.

Resident Donna Wright, a co-organizer of the effort, said the replanting was their way of expressing their thanks to the many anonymous people who helped fight the fire that had threatened their homes.

Fueled by a \$19,800 grant from Toyota, in May 1997 many Carlsbad youngsters received a hands-on education in the ecology of fire regeneration. The previous fall, several of them had learned what it was like to lose their home.

OCTOBER 27

3:00 PM The Red Cross Resource Center at Mission Estancia closes, due to lack of clientele. Victims in need of assistance are directed to call the Red Cross or Carlsbad Division Chief Mike Smith.

OCTOBER 28

12:15 AM Carlsbad Mayor Bud Lewis, other City Council members and staff escort FEMA Director James Witt and OES and other government representatives on a walking tour of damaged neighborhoods.

Also that day, city crews begin sandbagging efforts to prepare for potential rains.

OCTOBER 30

Morning: The first post-fire rains begin to fall. The rain is mild. The hillsides hold.

OCTOBER 31

8:00 AM CDF crews and others begin erosion control efforts.

FIRE TEACHES A RESPECT FOR NATURE

With the cause officially designated as “undetermined,” the Harmony Grove fire began perhaps accidentally, but not innocuously. It might have been a burning cigarette, or perhaps a portion of a catalytic converter flying off a vehicle speeding along the remote winding roads of unincorporated Elfin Forest. Many top-level fire officials strongly suspected arson; the annals of fire history are full of charred chapters written by such perverted authors of destruction.

Modern civilization and development also played a role, as did residents’ desire to turn the Southern California desert into an oasis of lush, non-indigenous vegetation.

“If you live in a dry desert area, close to brush, with eucalyptus trees and other burnable landscaping, and you have a wood shake shingle roof, you’re a fire waiting to happen,” stated Carlsbad Division Chief Mike Smith.

In her book, *Seekers of the Spring*, detailing the history of Carlsbad, Marje Howard-Jones proclaimed, “In name and in fact, Carlsbad is rooted in water.” Boasting three lagoons, over six miles of gorgeous coastline and a local mineral well with waters purportedly identical to those of a healthful spa in Karlsbad, Bohemia, water runs through Carlsbad’s history.

Now, fire has claimed a place in that history as well. At the height of the October 1996 event, firefighters feared the fire would blaze all the way to the coast. The sight would have been an ironic denouement to the preceding 24 hours.

In retrospect, the mixing of fire and water leads to a twofold conclusion. Wisdom resides in having a respect for nature, in learning not to tip the scales of balance by upsetting the natural ecology of the area in which we live. It also means doing what we can on an individual basis to protect our families and property against the intrusion of fire.

FROM A DECEMBER 1996 CITY NEWSLETTER ARTICLE BY JULIE CLARK, CARLSBAD HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

I’m sure every person who was touched by the fire has their own story to tell. For me, there are countless images which will replay in my mind for a long time.

MONDAY NIGHT ... Driving home from work and seeing the huge billowing clouds of smoke and flames blowing ... hearing my husband’s reassurance that ‘the fire will never cross Rancho Santa Fe Road; it will never get to your parents’ house’ ... explaining to my four-year-old daughter that even if Grammy and Grandpa’s house was not burned by the fire, their neighborhood would never look the same again ... getting my dad’s second phone call late that night announcing that, by some miracle, their house was still standing.

TUESDAY MORNING ... Getting an early morning phone call to report to the EOC, as I had been designated acting Human Resources Director while my boss was out of town ... driving to work in a mental fog ... working in the organized chaos of the EOC to set up a city presence next to the Red Cross at Mission Estancia School ... driving to my parents’ home that evening and seeing for myself only four home left standing at their end of the street where there used to be 22 ... seeing the tired, smoky faces of the firefighters as they ate their dinner on a wall separating two neighboring families — our family whose home was still standing and the neighbors, whose home was just a chimney.

THREE WEEKS LATER ... The images that replay in my mind will probably fade over time, but I hope I will remember the compassion, professionalism and caring I saw demonstrated by the Fire Department and all employees of our city during this disaster. I hope I will hold onto the feelings of respect and gratitude I felt for the city, its leaders and its employees during those two days of crisis. I hope I will remember how proud I felt, and how proud I still feel, to be an employee of the city of Carlsbad.

Through the grant, La Costa Canyon High School students cordoned off four plots of land in Cadencia Park, where the fire had left nought but dirt, ash and soot. After the winter rains, the soil was dotted with patches of black sage, wild cucumber, bush mallow and other plants rising from the ashes. During the eight-year project, students would observe how the fragile but enduring desert ecology recovers from fire.

Springing up near this project was a nature trail on fire-devastated soil, a joint effort among the high school, La Costa Heights Elementary School, and adult volunteers from AmeriCorps and the National Civilian Community Corps. The trail, which was opened to the public, consisted of four sections of native plants: utilitarian plants used for basket-weaving and food; medicinal plants; plants that have adapted to fire or sunlight; and plants with strong odors.

Planted along with the flora was the seed of intelligent ecology in these students of all ages. It took root as well in the fire victims rebuilding their homes. Most structures now boasted non-combustible roofs, stuccoed walls, no exposed wood and smarter landscaping. Those who remembered the fire of '96 would never take nature for granted again.

NOVEMBER 22

Afternoon: The first rebuilding permit plans by a Carlsbad homeowner who lost his home to fire are submitted to the Building Department.

DECEMBER 10

6:00 PM The Carlsbad City Council distributes proclamations in honor of the volunteer efforts of nearly 50 "ladies and gentlemen who came to our assistance and are heroes in Carlsbad," according to Mayor Lewis. Honorees include volunteers from the Salvation Army, American Red Cross and Neighbor to Neighbor as well as members of the California Conservation Corps and the California Department of Forestry.

JUNE 3, 1997

6:00 PM Seven and one-half months after the Harmony Grove fire, the Carlsbad City Council closes the Declaration of a State of Local Emergency initially proclaimed by City Manager Ray Patchett at 6:25 pm on October 21.

BACK TO HARMONY

Fire is one of several selective forces operating in chaparral country. It has resulted in many chaparral plants having an adaptation for stump sprouting; i.e., the fire may kill the above-ground portion of the plant, but the root remains alive and re-sprouts soon after the calamity subsides.

The re-sprouting of people's lives and dreams began soon after the October 1996 fire as well. One month and one day after the blaze, the first home rebuilding plans were submitted to Carlsbad's Community Development Office. July 25, 1997 was move-in day on Managua Place for the happy family whose fire-destroyed home was the first to be completely rebuilt as well as expanded and upgraded, as indeed many of the houses would be. The rebuilt home of another family was slated for completion on October 20, 1997, just in time for the family's baby scheduled to enter the world on October 21, precisely one year after the event.

Reflecting back in tranquility and awe at the event, people involved in the fire at several levels — residents, firefighters, city employees, service providers — repeatedly expressed a common belief. The fire had changed their life. Had made them value their lives, their relationships and their fellow human beings in a new and better way. Had shown them the meaning of working together, living in a community, sharing in the tragedy and sharing also in the triumph over tragedy.

The fire began out of Harmony. The spirit of the response brought the City of Carlsbad back to harmony again.

JULY 25, 1997

One of only four tile-roofed Carlsbad homes lost to the fire, the house at 2919 Managua Place becomes the first to be rebuilt and re-occupied.

APPENDIX A

FRONT PAGES OCTOBER 22, 1996

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

The San Diego Union-Tribune won a first-place California Newspaper Publishers Association award for its coverage of the Harmony Grove fire.

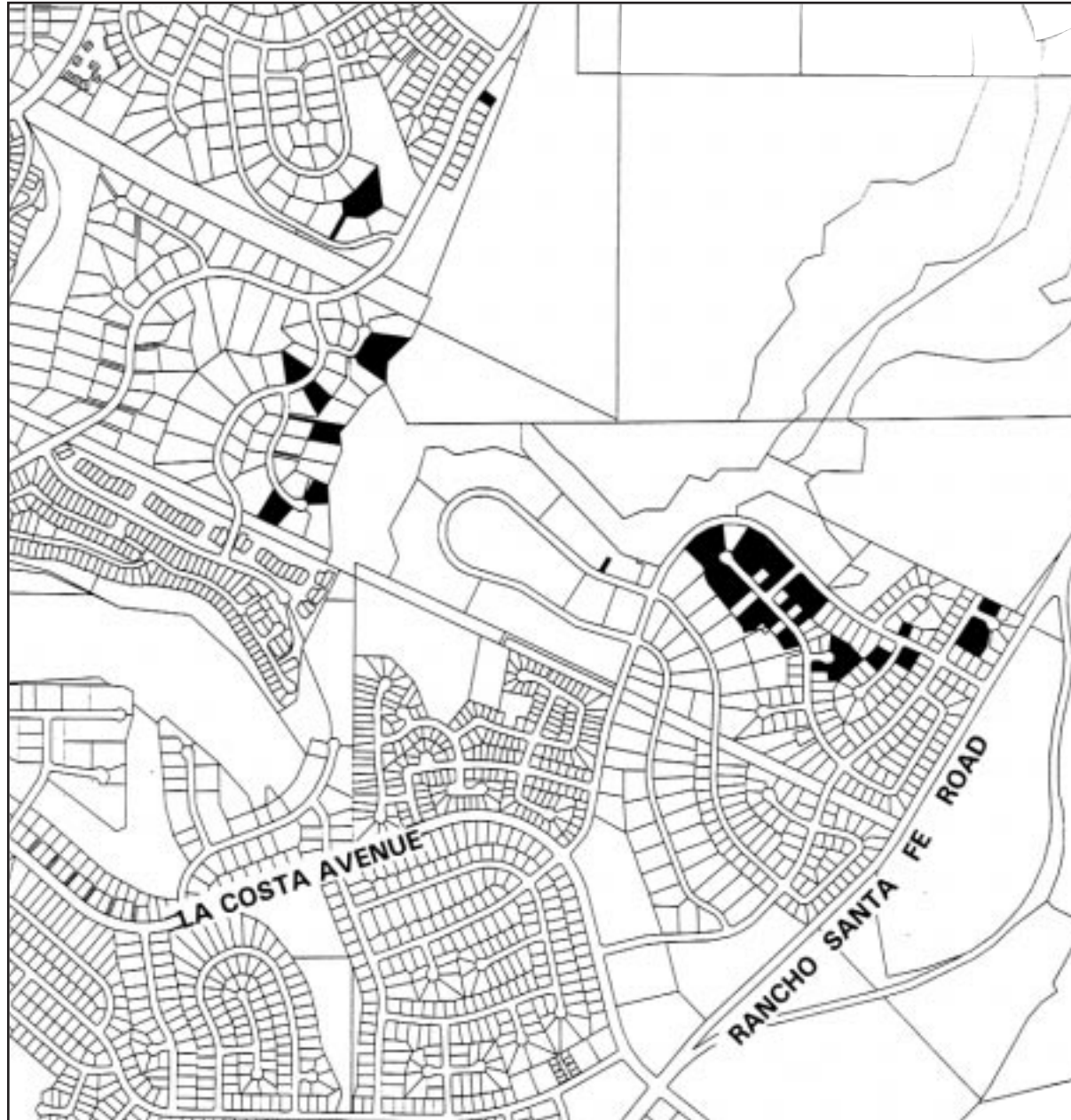
NORTH COUNTY TIMES

APPENDIX B

MAPS

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CARLSBAD HOMES DESTROYED



APPENDIX C

DAMAGE ASSESSMENT OF CARLSBAD HOMES DESTROYED

Address	Estimated Replacement Value	Type of Roof	Address	Estimated Replacement Value	Type of Roof
7224 Babilonia Street	\$ 372,606	Shake	7252 Esfera Street	\$ 223,392	Shake
3330 Bajo Court	\$ 127,218	Shake	3306 Febo Court	\$ 134,004	Shake
3332 Bajo Court	\$ 223,392	Shake	3308 Febo Court	\$ 262,002	Shake
3344 Bajo Court	\$ 223,392	Shake	3310 Febo Court	\$ 247,728	Shake
7315 Bolero Street	\$ 277,992	Shake	3312 Febo Court	\$ 247,728	Shake
7316 Bolero Street	\$ 358,488	Shake	3201 Fosca Street	\$ 160,524	Shake
7300 Borla Place	\$ 204,672	Shake	3203 Fosca Street	\$ 247,728	Shake
7302 Borla Place	\$ 238,368	Shake	3204 Fosca Street	\$ 247,728	Shake
7303 Borla Place	\$ 168,948	Shake	3205 Fosca Street	\$ 160,368	Shake
7305 Borla Place	\$ 247,728	Shake	3206 Fosca Street	\$ 168,948	Shake
3205 Cadencia Street	\$ 247,728	Shake	3207 Fosca Street	\$ 168,948	Shake
3207 Cadencia Street	\$ 204,672	Shake	3208 Fosca Street	\$ 247,728	Shake
3209 Cadencia Street	\$ 263,328	Shake	3209 Fosca Street	\$ 202,410	Shake
3211 Cadencia Street	\$ 168,948	Shake	3211 Fosca Street	\$ 247,728	Shake
3213 Cadencia Street	\$ 134,004	Shake	3212 Fosca Street	\$ 134,004	Shake
3301 Cadencia Street	\$ 168,948	Shake	3215 Fosca Street	\$ 134,004	Shake
3303 Cadencia Street	\$ 204,672	Shake	3216 Fosca Street	\$ 204,672	Shake
3305 Cadencia Street	\$ 204,672	Shake	3217 Fosca Street	\$ 247,728	Shake
3307 Cadencia Street	\$ 238,368	Shake	3219 Fosca Street	\$ 168,948	Shake
3322 Cadencia Street	\$ 239,148	Unknown	3223 Fosca Street	\$ 247,728	Shake
3168 Camino de Aguas	\$ 90,324	Tile	3225 Fosca Street	\$ 134,004	Shake
3170 Camino de Aguas	\$ 112,148	Tile	3220 Fosca Street	\$ 204,672	Shake
2907 Candil Place	\$ 390,546	Shake	3314 Fosca Street	\$ 204,672	Unknown
2909 Candil Place	\$ 374,088	Tile	2904 Managua Place	\$ 473,304	Tile
7026 El Fuerte Street	\$ 319,956	Shake	2919 Managua Place	\$ 253,734	Tile
7246 Esfera Street	\$ 127,218	Shake	2920 Managua Place	\$ 250,302	Composite
7248 Esfera Street	\$ 223,392	Shake			
7250 Esfera Street	\$ 159,666	Shake			
			Total Estimated Replacement Value	\$ 11,827,218	

APPENDIX D

CITY COUNCIL EMERGENCY MINUTES

APPENDIX E

DECLARATIONS OF EMERGENCY

APPENDIX F

SUMMARY OF COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENTS

In sum, the city of Carlsbad's hard costs related to emergency response, recovery activities and actual lost assets totalled \$518,091. After federal and state reimbursement, the net loss totalled \$201,583.

Description	City Claim	FEMA/State OES Reimbursement
FIRE RESPONSE		
Personnel	\$ 49,609	\$ 46,508
Material and Equipment	\$ 11,873	\$ 11,130
DEBRIS REMOVAL		
Personnel	\$ 1,009	\$ 946
Equipment	\$ 2,119	\$ 1,986
EROSION CONTROL		
Personnel	\$ 1,845	\$ 1,730
Material and Equipment	\$ 16,239	\$ 15,224
Contract Work	\$ 175,000	\$ 164,063
Consultant	\$ 64,125	\$ 60,117
FIRE LOSS		
Trees	\$ 180,000	\$ 13,100
Facilities	\$ 2,272	\$ 1,704
Equipment	\$ 14,000	\$ 0
TOTALS	\$ 518,091	\$ 316,508

APPENDIX G

MUTUAL AID AGENCIES RESPONDING TO THE HARMONY GROVE FIRE

San Marcos Fire Department	Pine Valley Fire Protection District	Willows Rural Fire Protection District	Clearlake Oaks Fire Protection District
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection	Colton Fire Department	Butte County Fire Department	Lakeport Fire Department
Escondido Fire Department	Rialto Fire Department	Quincy Fire Department	Kelseyville Fire Protection District
Elfin Forest Volunteer/ Harmony Grove Fire Department	San Bernardino County Fire Department	Loyalton Fire Department	Glenn Ellen Fire Protection District
Carlsbad Fire Department	Redlands Fire Department	Linda Fire Department	Sonoma Fire Department
Encinitas Fire Department	Orange County Fire Authority	Colusa Rural Fire Protection District	Valley of the Moon Fire Protection District
Rancho Santa Fe Fire Department	Apple Valley Fire Protection District	Sacramento County Fire Department	Kenwood Fire Protection District
Deer Springs Fire Protection District	Adelanto Fire Department	Folsom Fire Department	Schell-Bista Volunteer Fire Department
North County Fire Protection District	Hesperia Fire Department	South Placer Fire Protection District	Dougherty Regional Fire Department
Oceanside Fire Department	Victorville Fire Department	Placer Foothills Fire Protection District	Pleasanton Fire Department
Marine Corp Base Camp Pendleton Fire Department	Clovis Fire Department	Roseville Fire Department	Livermore Fire Department
Santee Fire Department	Fresno Fire Department	Dry Creek Fire Protection District	Mid Carmel Valley Fire Protection District
San Miguel Fire Protection District	North Central Fire Protection District	Willow Oaks Fire Protection District	Carmel Highlands Fire Protection District
Lemon Grove Fire Department	Fresno County Fire Department	Clarksburg Fire Protection District	Spreckels Volunteer Fire Department
La Mesa Fire Department	Orange Cove Fire Protection District	West Plainfield Fire Department	Carmel by the Sea Fire Department
East County Fire Protection District	Merced Fire Department	Woodland Fire Department	Camp Roberts Fire Department
Alpine Fire Protection District	Los Banos Fire Protection District	Davis Fire Department	Contra Costa Fire Department
San Diego Fire Department	Merced County Fire Department	El Dorado County Fire Department	Crocket-Carquinez Fire Protection District
Poway Fire Department	Atwater Fire Department	Rescue Volunteer Fire Department	Rodeo Fire Protection District
Vista Fire Department	Mariposa County Fire Department	El Dorado Hills Fire Department	Moraga Fire Protection District
Solana Beach Fire Department	Mariposa Public Utility District	Diamond Springs El Dorado Fire Protection District	Vallejo Fire Department
Del Mar Fire Department	Foster Fire Department	Georgetown Volunteer Fire Department	Dixon Fire Protection District
Chula Vista Fire Department	Hillsborough Fire Department	Alameda County Fire Department	Vacaville Fire Protection District
Bonita Fire Protection District	San Mateo Fire Department	East Bay Regional Parks Fire District	Suison City Fire Department
Imperial Beach Fire Department	Half Moon Bay Fire Protection District	Oakland Fire Department	Suison Fire Protection District
National City Fire Department	Millbrae Fire Department	Berkeley Fire Department	Benicia Fire Department
Coronado Fire Department	Napa County Fire Department	Lawrence-Livermore Lab	Ventura County Fire Protection District
San Diego Rural Fire Protection District	Napa City Fire Department	U.C. Fire Department	Salinas Rural Fire Protection District
San Pasqual Fire Protection District	American Canyon Fire Protection District	South Lake County Fire Protection District	Julian Volunteer Fire Department
Sycuan Fire Department	Calistoga Fire Department	Upper Lake Fire Protection District	Kern County Fire Department
	Susanville Fire Department	Lucerne Parks and Recreation District Fire Department	USDA Forest Service
	Weaverville Fire Department		
	Redding Fire Department		

APPENDIX H

AUXILIARY REPORTS



BACK TO HARMONY

October 21, 1997 • 5:06 PM